



**Video:**  
**Discussion with Amber Parks and**  
**Henry Sanchez**

Chaplain's Office  
University Passage Resource

**Holy and Acceptable**  
**Romans 12:1**  
**With Amber Parks and Henry Sanchez**

Many ethnic groups in the Greco-Roman world performed animal sacrifice, but it did not have the same meaning for every group. Ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, and other nations in antiquity slayed and offered animals as a means of feeding the gods. By so doing, they hoped to placate or satiate their gods. In this way, they could gain favor from the gods and avoid their wrath. In the most abysmal of pagan practices, a human being would be the highest sacrifice slayed and offered.

Israel, the people of Paul's ethnic heritage, rejected human sacrifice altogether, and instituted the practice of animal sacrifice as a replacement. Israel furthermore rejected the pagan idea of sacrifice as food for God. This is because God does not need anything from us. There is nothing we can give to placate or satiate God. In Judaism, the purpose of animal sacrifice was to remove sins. When the animal victim was presented, the community's or petitioner's sins were laid upon it. When the animal was slain, sins were removed. With the barrier of sins removed, reconciliation (or *at-one-ment*) occurs between God and human beings. God only wants a loving relationship with us.

However, a tradition emerged in Judaism, particularly among the prophets who eventually rejected animal sacrifice as the most effective means of atonement. In that tradition, the most effective sacrifices were those of the heart—for example, love, justice, mercy, obedience, humility, and righteousness. Human beings were called upon to be "living sacrifices" in contrast to the slain sacrifices offered in familiar practice.

On the cross, Jesus Christ did what neither animal sacrifice nor the sacrifices of the heart could do: He broke the "power of sin" and reconciled all Creation to God. The sacrifices of the heart now occur in response to an atonement already made.

Paul the Apostle stands in the light of Christ when he calls upon us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. We are "holy" when we have freely set ourselves apart for service to God. We are "acceptable" when we have sincerely submitted ourselves to God. Depending on your English translation, Paul says that this is our "spiritual worship," "reasonable service," "true and proper worship," or other, similar phrasing. Paul means that this kind of sacrifice is our best response to the mercy of God, however we translate the phrase. God calls upon us still to make our best response to the mercy we have received.

1. What do you think about when you hear the words "living sacrifice"?
2. What should "holy living" look like today?
3. Paul describes our response to God's mercy as "spiritual worship," "reasonable service," "true and proper worship," or other, similar phrasing. Which translation of the phrase do you prefer and why?