

Every Sunday Communion in Scripture?

Do We Have to...?

Do we *have* to go to Disneyworld? What's wrong or odd about your child asking you that question?

"The Lord's Supper is no more and no less than a means ordained by Christ to offer and impart to all who partake of this meal the forgiveness of sins which Christ secured for men. In other words, the Lord's Supper is not Law, but pure Gospel, is not a work that we do for Christ, but a work that Christ does to us. It is a work through which He assures us that by His reconciling death we have obtained a gracious God."¹

Hezekiah 2:19...

There is no passage dictating the specific frequency of the Lord's Supper in Scripture, but A.L. Barry's words come in handy:

We receive the Lord's Supper often because of how much we need what the Lord gives in His Supper. We dare never make a law about how often an individual "should" or "must" receive the Lord's Supper. But this is a separate question from how frequently Holy Communion is offered in our congregations. Our Lutheran Confessions make it clear that the Lord's Supper is offered every Lord's Day and on other days when there are communicants present (AC XXIV.34 and Ap. XXIV.1).²

Acts 2:42

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42, ESV)

"ἦσαν δὲ προσκατεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ, τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς." (Acts 2:42, SBLGNT)

The Ohio State

What does it signify if someone corrects you saying it's not Ohio State, but "*The Ohio State.*" What's the difference?

Wallace's Greek Grammar categorizes Acts 2:42 as an example of the use of the Well-Known or "Familiar" article. He writes, "Either this pattern of worship was well known in the early church because it was the *common* manner in which it was done, or Luke was attempting to convey that each element of the worship was the only one deserving of the name."³ Something more than brunch was happening in "the breaking of the bread."

¹ Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics.*, vol. 3 (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 293.

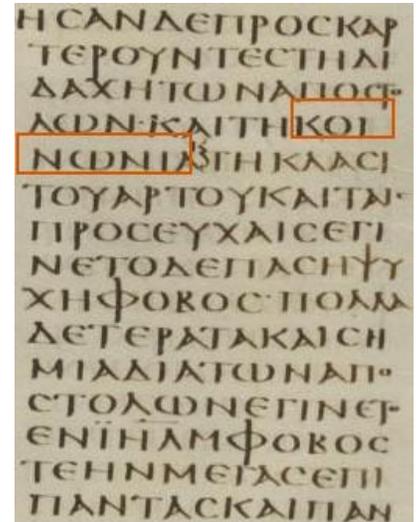
² A.L. Barry, "What about the Sacrament of the Altar?" <https://files.lcms.org/file/preview/nSL2nSiZqKLQWqDiMJXeAgJzwjIE1yrw?>

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament : With Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 225.

Grammar Saves Lives

What's the difference between "Let's eat, grandma!" and "Let's eat grandma?"

The original Greek had no punctuation. They would have read Acts 2:42 like this:



"AND THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP TO THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND THE PRAYERS."

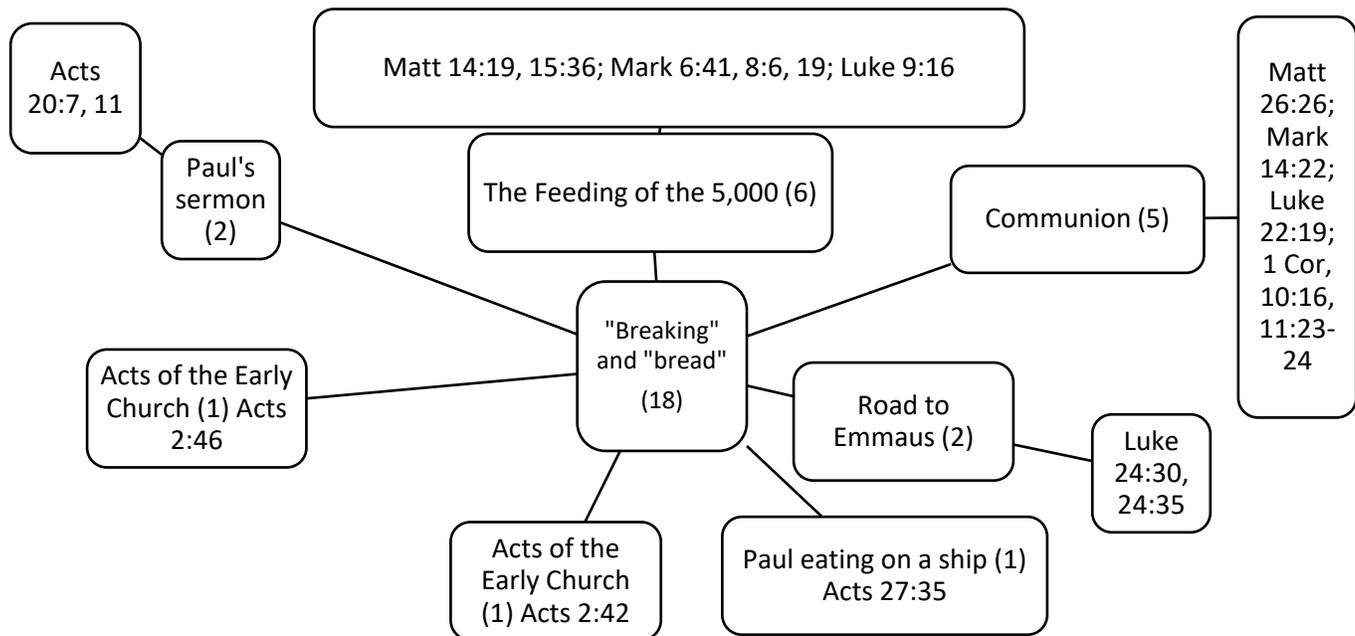
Moreover, there is no "and" between "the fellowship" and "the breaking of the bread." One such scholar argues that this verse is better translated, "And they were devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communion (koinonia) in the breaking of the bread and to the prayers."⁴

This coincides with 1 Corinthians 10:16, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (koinonia/communion/fellowship) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation (koinonia/communion/fellowship) in the body of Christ?"

⁴ Thomas M. Winger, "The Divine Service: Historical Introduction," in *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Services* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2022), 297.

One might argue that the nearer context of Acts 2:46 (“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts”) Proves that Acts 2:42 refers to a normal meal. This doesn’t necessarily follow. The same scholar argues Acts 2:46 also references the Lord’s Supper.⁵

Breaking Bread Throughout Scripture



There are 18 occurrences of various forms of the phrase “breaking bread.” They can be grouped into six categories. Broadly speaking, “breaking bread,” does not necessarily connote that those participating in the meal had the Lord’s Supper as in the case of the Feeding of the 5,000, the Road to Emmaus, and Paul’s meal on a ship. Five of them are clearly in the context of the Lord’s Supper. Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11 are disputed. There is good evidence and a plurality of scholars who believe that Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7, 11 are references to the Lord’s Supper.

Secondary Literature

Casting Doubt on Acts 2:42 being the Lord’s Supper

C.J. Södergren argues that Acts 2:42 refers to a non-sacramental Love-feast that often concluded with the Lord’s Supper.⁶ However, he argues that Acts 20:7, 11 refers to the Lord’s Supper.⁷ Francis Pieper cites 17th century Lutheran theologian Johann Gerhard writing, “But because it cannot be demonstrated evidently and indisputably that it is necessary by ‘breaking of bread’ to understand the administration of the Supper in Acts 2:42; 20:7, some explain the phrase of ordinary meals, in which sense it is used Luke 24:35; Acts 27:35, and many others”⁸

⁵ Thomas M. Winger, 298.

⁶ C. J. Södergren, *The Acts with Commentaries* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1927).

⁷ Södergren, 196.

⁸ Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics.*, 3:292n4.

The authoritative lexicon of the Greek New Testament writes, “Whether there is a ref. to Eucharistic observance cannot be determined with certainty. Some would also put Luke 24:35 here.”⁹

The *Lutheran Study Bible* notes Acts 2:42 “Could include the Holy Supper.”¹⁰ They cite the Apology to the Augsburg Confession “Although we do not object if some interpret these passages as referring to the Sacrament, it does not make sense that only one part of the Sacrament was given. According to the ordinary usage of language, naming one part also means the other” (Apology XXII 7).

Acts 2:42 Does Refer to the Lord’s Supper

Famous evangelical scholar F.F. Bruce writes that “the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper is no doubt indicated.”¹¹ Likewise, Lutheran commentator Lenski views this as a reference to the Lord’s Supper.¹² Additionally, the synodical catechisms refer to the breaking of the bread as a name for the Lord’s Supper.¹³ Martin Chemnitz, a Lutheran theologian who was contemporaneous with Johann Gerhard, uses Acts 2:42 in reference to the Lord’s Supper.¹⁴

The older Lutheran Self-Study Bible maintains that Acts 2:42 and 20:7, 11 are references to communion.¹⁵ Likewise, Arthur Just in his Luke commentary says that the Breaking of the Bread refers to the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶ The 1995 Synod Resolution RESOLUTION 2-08A Overture 2-51 (CW, pp. 149-50) as well as A.L. Barry’s comments in his pamphlet on the Lord’s Supper presuppose Act 2:42 refers to the Lord’s Supper.

Tom Winger in a recent publication is the boldest of the sources in Pastor Eichers’ collection. He offers the alternate translation that makes Acts 2:42 only a list of three things and argues Acts 2:46 is in fact an extension of the sacramental ministry of verse 42.¹⁷

Putting It All Together

Some Christians have shed doubt on or have been noncommittal as to whether “the breaking of the bread” in Acts 2:42 could refer to the Lord’s Supper. With the definite article highlighting the importance of *the* breaking of the bread, the question must be asked if it isn’t the Lord’s Supper,

⁹ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 546.

¹⁰ Edward Engelbrecht and Paul E. Deterding, eds., *The Lutheran Study Bible: English Standard Version* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2015), 1836.

¹¹ F. F. (Frederick Fyvie) Bruce 1910-1990., *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1986), 79.

¹² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1961), 117.

¹³ 1943 pages 193, 201; 1986, page 228; 2005, page 232; 2017, page 329 (although not specifically listing it as a name for the Lord’s Supper, it refers to Acts 2:42 in reference to the Lord’s Supper). All these catechisms use Acts 2:42 as a proof text in reference to the Lord’s Supper. Note that the Wisconsin Synod Catechism teaches a name for the Lord’s Supper is the Breaking of the Bread without specifically using Acts 2:42 as a proof text for the Lord’s Supper. Martin Luther, *Luther’s Catechism: The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther.*, trans. Stephen Geiger, Anniversary edition, New International Version. (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 351.

¹⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. J. A. O. Preus, vol. 2–3 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 711.

¹⁵ Robert G. Hoerber, *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, New International Version. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 1659, 1697.

¹⁶ Arthur A. Jr. Just, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1996), 829.

¹⁷ Thomas M. Winger, “The Divine Service: Historical Introduction,” 297–98.

what other practice is Luke inviting us to emulate based on the practices of the early church if it isn't the Lord's Supper? If it is, say, a communal meal or love-feast, would our congregation be better served engaging in a Bible study on the value of Christian hospitality and making refreshments at fellowship hour a regular fixture? Of particular note would be gleaning insights from a book like *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* which details the author's journey from unbelief to faith from conversations over meals at a Christian's house.¹⁸

It is understood that the phrase breaking bread is used in other senses throughout Scripture, but due to the similarity to 1 Corinthians 10:16 and its immediate context being other holy acts such as the teaching of the apostles and prayer, it is warranted to see this as something more than just a common meal.

Many Christians have understood "the breaking of the bread" as a term for the Lord's Supper. There is a consensus among our Synodical publications, most notably our editions of Luther's Small Catechism, that Acts 2:42 discusses the eucharist.

What's at stake here? If Acts 2:42 refers to Holy Communion, then it is an example—alongside the episode of Paul gathering on Sunday in Acts 20:7, 11—of the practices of the earliest church, namely, the church immediately after Pentecost. Acts 2:42 gives us a window into the earliest practices of worship: preaching, prayer, and holy communion. This is not a legalistic demand to weekly communion, but it is a gracious invitation to follow in the footsteps of the Apostles themselves.

When We Meet, We Eat

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. Look especially verses 17, 20, and 33. "When you come together..." What is presupposed when they meet together?

Table Fellowship: God for Dinner

Table fellowship was an integral part of Jesus' ministry. He frequently used the occasion of a meal to create fellowship with people. Jesus' table fellowship may be defined as the gracious *presence* of Jesus at table, where he *teaches* about the kingdom of God and shares a *meal* in an atmosphere of acceptance, friendship, and peace. His usual table fellowship practice combined those three ingredients: his presence, his teaching, and his eating.

Old Testament

- Garden of Eden
- Genesis 18
- Passover
- Exodus 24:9–11
- Sacrificial meals in the temple

New Testament (Luke)

Lk 5:27–39, the feast with Levi the tax collector; 7:18–35, the bridegroom and the ascetic; 7:36–50, at table Jesus forgives a sinful woman who anointed his feet; 9:10–17, the feeding of the five thousand; 14:1–24, Sabbath healing, meal etiquette, and the banquet; 15:1–2, 11–32, meals with sinners and the meal in the

¹⁸ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

story of the prodigal son; 19:1–10, Jesus lodges with Zacchaeus; 22:14–38, the Last Supper; and 24:13–35, the Emmaus meal

There is common ground between the Passover Seder, Jesus' meals during his earthly ministry, and the celebration of "the breaking of the bread" by the early church. All are sacred meals at which God is present in a fuller sense than at other meals. At each meal divine teaching accompanies the repast. Nevertheless, the language that the church properly reserves for the Lord's Supper is not appropriate for describing the full range of these biblical meals, since only some of them were celebrations of the Sacrament, and the other meals did not convey the same benefits as Holy Communion. The language of table fellowship encompasses all of these biblical repasts, while allowing for the significant differences in the benefits God bestowed through them. Calling all of these meals instances of table fellowship by no means implies that they all were celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Yet the language of table fellowship intends to capture the connections indicated by the terminology of Luke himself, who records "the breaking of the bread" in a variety of settings: seemingly ordinary meals (Acts 20:11; 27:35), miracles of Jesus (Lk 9:16; 24:30, 35), and celebrations of the Sacrament (Lk 22:19; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7).

As one traces the table fellowship theme throughout Luke, the hearer or reader discerns a pattern in which there are *three essential elements to table fellowship: the presence of God in Jesus, his teaching, and his eating together with sinners*. The presence of Jesus at the meal makes this table fellowship different from all other meals. It is a meal with God! *Not every meal is the Lord's Supper, but each is a supper with the Lord, and each relates to his cross and resurrection.*

The Last Supper is different from all previous meals, for it is here that Jesus speaks for the first time of "the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you" (Lk 22:20). Matthew emphasizes that Jesus' shed blood in the Supper is "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). The Last Supper is the Meal of the new covenant, the new "exodus" (Lk 9:31), the new Passover (22:17–19; cf. 1 Cor 5:7). As Jesus institutes the Sacrament of his body and blood, he directs the disciples, "Do this in my remembrance" (Lk 22:19). The Last Supper is the only one of Jesus' table fellowship meals that is to be repeated, and it is to be repeated "until such a time as it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (22:16; cf. 1 Cor 11:26). Thus the Supper has a strong eschatological focus that anticipates Christ's return and the consummation of the kingdom. Later Luke records that the disciples regularly celebrated "the breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42, 46). The Supper was held on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)—Sunday, the day of resurrection—in remembrance of the risen Lord. The Greek infinitive of purpose implies that a chief reason for the Sunday gathering of Christians was "to break bread" (Acts 20:7). The Supper was not incidental or superfluous; its regular celebration lay at the heart and center of the corporate life of the early church.

The evangelist's final word about Emmaus is programmatic for Christian worship until the Last Day: "And they were expounding the things he taught on the road and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (24:35). The breaking of the bread recalls all of Jesus' table fellowship, particularly 22:19 and the Words of Institution. ***Jesus' continuing practice of teaching and eating with his disciples at table has given the church the pattern for its liturgical worship.*** Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7 confirm that *from the beginning the church followed the divine pattern through worship that included teaching and the celebration of the Lord's Supper*. Worship in the NT church is a continuing table fellowship with God that reaches back into the OT and looks ahead to the eschatological wedding supper (Is 25:6–9; Rev 19:6–9), affording a foretaste of the feast to come. Jesus' table fellowship lies at the very heart of the kingdom of God as it is now present in the liturgical life of the church.¹⁹

¹⁹ Arthur A. Just Jr., *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Pub. House, 1996), 231–241.