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Fellowship Halls & The Lord's Supper

Question: *Does the expression in Acts 20:11, "and had broken the bread and eaten" refer to the same "bread" of verse 7, or is this bread ordinary food? In view of many churches engaging in what they call "fellowship" meals, does this verse authorize such a practice?*

Answer: The term "breaking of bread" is used in the New Testament to describe both the Lord's Supper as well as a common meal; consequently, it can be confusing which is intended. The only way to determine what is meant is by examining the context. For example, Acts 27:33-36 uses this term but obviously describes a common meal eaten after fourteen days of fasting during Paul's shipwreck. Also, Acts 2:46 refers to the ordinary meal while it tells of their extraordinary joy as they "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." On the other hand, the term "breaking of bread" without doubt refers to the Lord's Supper in Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-24; Matt. 26:26. Paul wrote, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

Breaking Bread in Acts 20:7

The context of Acts 20:7-11 uses the term "breaking of bread" to describe both the Lord's Supper as well as the common meal. "And upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). This verse refers to the Lord's Supper. Evidently there was a

planned and special reason for the disciples gathering together according to the phrase "... when the disciples came together to break bread ..." Paul had tarried there seven days (v. 6), and the implication is that he waited until this special day on which all the saints would come together. Furthermore, the first day of the week is corroborated as a regular time of meeting by the letter to the church at Corinth. The first day of the week was the time specified for the saints to contribute (1 Cor. 16:2). The church also partook of the Lord's Supper when they came together (1 Cor. 11: 20-30). Therefore we have New Testament authority established by these examples when the Lord's Supper is to be observed. As often as the first day of the week comes, we should come together "to break bread."

Now To Acts 20:11

However, Acts 20:11 refers to the common meal: "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." Two basic reasons force us to conclude this meaning: (1) The purpose for the gathering was to "break bread" (v. 7). It is reasonable to assume this eating was done even before Paul preached since it was the primary reason for gathering. Why would they have delayed? It would be strange, indeed, if by his lengthy discourse they had delayed the very purpose for which all had assembled. (2) Only Paul is described as eating in v. 11. Nothing is said about what the others did. Obviously, several hours had passed between v. 7 and v. 11. Since Paul was intending to depart "on the morrow" (v. 7) this is what he did at "break of day" (v. 11). In fact, had the breaking of bread in v. 11 been the Lord's Supper it would

have been done on the second day of the week, for after midnight it was "on the morrow"! Troas, being a Gentile governed city, was obviously on Roman time

How About "Fellowship" Meals?

The last part of your question is also answered by the examination of what is stated in Acts 20:11. Nothing is said about the whole group of disciples. No word is mentioned about "fellowship" meals either in this text or any other passage of the New Testament. This verse tells us what Paul did! Even if all the brethren were still gathered and did eat with him, it is a long way from being authority for a local church to plan, promote, and sponsor a common or social meal for its members.

The New Testament is exceedingly clear regarding the purpose for the coming together of the church "to break bread" (1 Cor. 11:20-30). Let it be for the Lord's Supper. In fact, the apostle speaks of the common meal by saying, "What? Have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (v. 22). "And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation" (v. 34). This is not a condemnation of brethren eating together, but it does establish that common meals are not the work of the church per se. While it is good for brethren to get together and rejoice and be encouraged by one another as in Acts 2:46, yet to use the funds contributed for the work of the Lord to build kitchens, gymnasiums, etc. is a big leap without Bible authority. The church is a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5) with a spiritual mission (1 Tim. 3:15). Let us beware lest we change its glory to something much inferior!

-A Christian