

In verses 21-22 we learn that a custom had developed of people bringing their own supper to the meeting of the church, and of eating it prior to the service in which they observed the Lord's Supper. Some brought a large amount of food and drink; others brought little. Those who brought much ate much; those who brought little ate little. Those who brought much appear to have come early and to have begun to eat and drink early, without bothering to wait for those who had little, brought little, and came at the specified time of the service. Of course, by the time those who had little came, those who had much had eaten and drunk much (note verse 21 -- "One remains hungry, another gets drunk."; and verse 33 -- "When you come together to eat, wait for each other.").

Those who came early and brought much and ate much showed that they thought only of their own appetites, despised the other members of the church, and shamed those who had little. Paul says that their actions were not praiseworthy but blameworthy (note verse 22).

Under these conditions it simply was not possible to eat the Lord's Supper (verse 20). By the time the believers got to the observance of the Lord's table, some were drunk, and some were still hungry (verse 21). Those who were drunk obviously could not partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner (verse 27); those who were hungry probably focused more on satisfying their hunger with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper than on remembering the Lord's broken body and shed blood!

Therefore the instruction in verse 28 -- "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" -- taken in context, appears to refer, not to a general self-examination regarding unrepented or unconfessed sin, but a self-examination to judge whether one is able to participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. And it would appear that the test of worthiness or unworthiness to participate depends on a person's ability to discern the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper, as