

## The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith (2)

*Text: Belgic Confession 7; II Timothy 3:13-4:4*

In our previous study of *Belgic Confession* article 7, we introduced the concept of *canon* sufficiency – that the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments form the complete and final canon of God’s written revelation. No oral revelations (such as those claimed by Charismatics) and no written additions (like the Apocrypha or Roman Catholic tradition) are needed. We will now build on that foundation by focusing on what we call *content* sufficiency: not only is the Bible complete in terms of the books it contains, but the *teaching* within those books is sufficient for all matters of salvation, faith and godly living.

To clarify this doctrine, we must begin by understanding what sufficiency does *not* mean. The Bible is not a manual for changing a tyre: you won’t fix your car by reading the Psalms. But Scripture is sufficient to guide your *behaviour* in such moments: be patient, avoid complaining and do not swear (James 1:19-20). Likewise, the Bible won’t help you pass a biology or history exam directly: students must study textbooks and not rely solely on Scripture. Yet Scripture instructs us not to study on the Lord’s Day (Exod. 20:8), to work heartily (Col. 3:23) and to avoid boasting in academic success (Prov. 27:2).

### Clarifying the Doctrine of Sufficiency

The sufficiency of Scripture even intersects with these subjects: Genesis 1 teaches that God created all life in six days, and the seventh commandment teaches that sexuality involves more than biology—it involves moral responsibility. While Scripture does not contain French vocabulary, proficiency in another language might be stewarded in service to the church (e.g., translating sound literature).

Scripture won’t tell you which house to buy or which car to drive. You cannot determine God’s will by opening your Bible randomly. But Scripture will guide you in these decisions: Can you *afford* the house? Are you motivated by *covetousness*? Will the location hinder your attendance at a true church? God’s Word provides the necessary ethical framework.

Even in sports, Scripture offers relevant instruction. It won't say which team will win, but it speaks to how a Christian behaves as a supporter. Don't watch or play on the Lord's Day. Don't riot or sing rude songs. Don't sneak looks at match results under the pretence of checking the weather. And remember, "bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things" (I Tim. 4:8).

The sufficiency of Scripture is specific. It is not sufficient for every task, but it is completely sufficient for all that pertains to salvation, doctrine, worship, and godliness.

### **Practical Areas Where Scripture Guides**

Article 7 states: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein." Scripture teaches both God's will of decree and of command. It reveals the way of salvation—how Christ accomplished it, how the Spirit applies it, how the church receives it and how God will bring it to completion.

It continues: "[T]he whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large." This stands in sharp opposition to Roman Catholicism, which claims Scripture is not sufficient for worship. Rome adds five sacraments to the biblical two, imposes unity with the Pope and defends idolatry and prayers to Mary based on "sacred tradition."

The article concludes: "[I]t doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects." Scripture is sufficient for the six *loci* of theology: God, man, Christ, salvation, church and the last things. It is also sufficient for worship, ethics, sacraments and church governance.

The title summarizes this beautifully: "The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures to be the Only Rule of Faith." The Bible alone is the infallible authority for what Christians believe and how they live.

The *Westminster Confession* echoes *Belgic* article 7. In chapter 1, section 6, it says: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture." Scripture teaches us how to glorify God, how to be saved, what to believe, and how to live. It adds: "[u]nto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men." This is a direct refutation of Charismatic and Roman claims to ongoing revelation. It continues:

“Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.” The Bible is objectively sufficient, but the Holy Spirit must enlighten the heart for a saving understanding. The confession recognises that some circumstances – like times of worship or number of elders – are not specified in Scripture but are to be decided by “the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word.” For instance, Scripture commands worship on the Lord’s Day, but it does not say *when* on Sunday. We choose 11am and 6pm because these are convenient and reverent times.

Similarly, Scripture commands Psalm-singing (James 5:13; Eph. 5:19), but doesn’t specify how many. Four is manageable. We avoid singing too many stanzas or verses at any point during the service (e.g., we don’t sing all 22 stanzas of Psalm 119). These decisions are governed by the principles: “Let all things be done unto edifying” (I Cor. 14:26) and “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40).

In church government, the Bible teaches that each congregation must have a *plurality* of elders (Titus 1:5). But how many exactly? That depends on the congregation’s size and needs. Meetings are often held monthly – frequent enough to be responsible, but not so often as to become burdensome. These practical details are governed by Christian wisdom.

### **The Testimony of Scripture to Its Own Sufficiency**

In his final epistle, Paul writes to Timothy: “From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). Paul is referring to the Old Testament, which alone is sufficient to teach Christ. We do not need visual aids, mystical traditions, or external authorities.

Then: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (v. 16). These four cover everything: what to believe, where we’re wrong, how to change, and how to live rightly.

Verse 17 concludes: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” Scripture equips believers thoroughly – for every good work. What more is needed?

In short, Scripture is sufficient for our creed (what we believe), our character (what we are) and our conduct (what we do). That's what you should expect from personal devotions and public preaching.

If someone asks how much time should be spent in reading versus prayer during devotions, the response is pastoral: don't impose human rules. Let all things be done unto edification. Be flexible. Some days you may read more, others pray more. Don't bind the conscience where God has not. But if you do make a vow, keep it (Eccl. 5:4).

Psalms 19:7-11 is a classic Old Testament witness to Scripture's sufficiency:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.

The Word is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean and true. It converts, makes wise, brings joy, enlightens and warns. There is no greater treasure. We do not need the theories of modern psychology. We need more *Bible*.

How does one come to know and experience the sufficiency of Scripture? First, the Holy Spirit must assure you inwardly. But also, you must become familiar with the Bible – its doctrines, applications and patterns. Then you will see how it equips you to make decisions, endure trials and walk wisely. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105).

Sometimes we fail to feel this sufficiency because of ignorance or sin. But we must return to the Word, seek forgiveness and be renewed. As our knowledge and confidence grow, so too does our grasp of how sufficient Scripture truly is.