

“Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock!”

The Importance of the Spiritual Watchman Ministry for the End-Time Church

Rudolf Ebertshäuser

Introduction

As believers of the 21st century, we live in difficult and perilous times, as predicted by Scripture (2 Tim 3:1). Our calling is the same as that of all believers in the Church of God since Pentecost: we have the privilege of living for our Lord Jesus Christ, serving the eternal God as priests, and being witnesses of the Gospel.

We are called to serve as builders and assistants in the glorious construction of the house of God, which is carried out for the glory of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, and which will continue on until the church is united with its Lord and heavenly head in the rapture.

We have the promise of our Lord that HE will build His church, and that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Mt 16:18). We can courageously, joyfully, and diligently spread the wonderful gospel message of Christ's salvation and experience how God, through His Word, still saves people and makes them pardoned children of God.

On the other hand, today we are placed in tremendous spiritual battles through the developments of the end times, that is, the last days before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Lord Himself warned His own that this time would be marked above all by deceptions and by a decline of the true faith. Three times in His end-time discourse in Matthew 24, we read this grave warning against being deceived:

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying: 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. (...) And many false prophets will rise up, deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (...) For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. (Mt 24,4-5+11-12+24-25)

These end-time deceptions had already begun in the times of the apostles, and they will only reach their terrible climax at the appearance of the Antichrist, whose seductive power is so impressively described in 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 and Revelation 13:11-18. But between these two time periods there is a spiritual development, which the Lord Himself marks with the image of "labour pains" (Mt 24:8).

Labour pains are characterized by the fact that they begin in a lighter form and with longer intervals between them and then become stronger and stronger and follow each other more rapidly, until they then strive for a climax with irresistible power and force shortly before birth. In this way we can see that the spiritual powers of deception have influenced the true church from the very beginning, but that the closer we come to the return of our Lord, the more powerful and intense they become.

When we fight against this end-time deception, we are ultimately not dealing with flesh and blood (cf. Eph 6:10-20), with human opinions and human forces, but with spirits of darkness, with the antichrist's spirit of error (1 Jn 4:1-6), with seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1).

The Devil uses false prophets, false teachers, and false apostles to introduce heresies and divisions into the church of God and to dissuade believers from the biblical following of Christ and the biblical church growth. The work of the invisible spiritual powers also explains why the end-time errors spread with such uncanny power and speed, dragging with them many nominal Christians, but also true believers.

The great deceptive trends of our time, the pseudo-prophetic deception of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement (cf. Mt 7:15-23; 1 Jn 4:1), the seduction of biblical criticism (Modernism, Higher Criticism) (Rev 22:19; 2 Pt 2:1) and the ecumenical unity movement (2 Cor 6:14-18; Revelation 17 and 18) are having an increasingly strong impact on the true church of God, especially here in the "Christian West", but also among the young churches in the mission fields.

We are seeing a strong deceptive pull that is sweeping away all the unstable and the fake Christians, and which can only be resisted by those who are vigilant, grounded in Christ and His Word, intentionally swimming against the tide.

All those who still genuinely want to hold on to the Lord and His Word must recognise this end-time development clearly and soberly, while arming themselves so that they are not also seduced: ***"You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked."*** (2Pt 3:17).

How seriously this danger needs to be taken can be seen, for example, in the fact that entire congregations with a Bible believing character slip into charismatic waters or open themselves up to criticism of the Bible and ecumenism. The intrusion of criticism of the Bible into numerous Bible schools and seminars that used to be faithful to the Bible is just as much a warning signal as the ecumenical involvement of leading evangelical theologians.

At such a time, we need vigilance, humility, and fervent supplication before God to open our eyes and preserve us so that we may survive and overcome in the midst of these powerful errors. Proud appeal to old Bible believing tradition and haughty complacency, on the other hand, are very dangerous today. This is a time when God also exercises judgment in the house of God (1Pt 4:17), when all Bible believing churches which are infected by the spirit of Laodicea that says, ***"I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing!"*** (Rev 3:17), have to experience how they slip off, and the Lord removes their lampstand from its place.

Now, in these end times, a ministry that has always been commanded and practiced in the church of God, becomes particularly important - the *watchman's ministry in the house of God*. The commandment to *watch* is found no less than 15 times in the NT, describing an attitude which applies to *all believers*. Our Lord Jesus Himself has instructed all His disciples accordingly in connection with the end-time situation; in Mark 13 we find it uttered three times, which underlines its special importance:

Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. (...) Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming - in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning - (...) And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch! (Mk 13:33-37).

Being vigilant and watching is a special commandment in the face of the spiritual attacks of the adversary on the church:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1Pt 5:8-9)

If this is true for the attacks of persecution, how much more for the cunning attacks of deception, where Satan appears disguised as an *"angel of light"* (2Cor 11:1-15)! Especially today, the commandment from 1 Corinthians 16:13 is so important: ***"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong."*** And it is precisely today that our vigilance must be expressed above all in constant prayer: ***"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving"*** (Col 4:2; cf. Eph 6:18).

This brochure was written to draw the attention of today's believers, and especially those in charge in the congregations, to the importance of the spiritual ministry of the watchman. May the Lord of the church use them to wake up many more, to encourage vigilance and spirit-led resistance against the cunning attempts of the seductive powers! May the Lord give grace that we may all be vigilant and together serve the Lord in accordance with His will in this difficult time!

A. The Importance of the Watchman's Ministry for the Church

The spiritual ministry of the watchman in the church of God takes its meaning basically from the fact that the church, as long as it is not yet glorified, is in constant danger of deviation from the way of God as revealed in the Bible.

Believers in Christ are engaged in an ongoing spiritual battle. On the one hand, they are subject to the edifying, sanctifying, and transforming influence of their Lord through the action of the Spirit of God and through His inspired Word; however, they are also exposed to the seductive, corrosive, degrading influence of the world, Satan and the flesh.

God Himself has permitted that believers are exposed to these evil influences to a certain, limited extent, in order to test them and to prompt them to be vigilant and faithful. God wants to teach us spiritually to be steadfast overcomers who overcome the flesh, the devil, and the world in order to glorify God (cf. 1 Jn 5:4-5; Revelation 2 and 3; indirectly Rev 12:11). Here the remarkable word from Deuteronomy 12:32 and 13:1-5 can help us understand God's purposes:

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. If there arises among you a prophet or dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods - which you have not known - and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

Deception is permitted by God to test and prove our faith. We are subjected to deception so that we may learn to overcome, so that in dealing with the lie we may thus know the truth all the more deeply and preserve it all the more firmly, so that we may go on from spiritual childhood to maturity, so that **"those who are approved may be recognized among you"** (1 Cor 11:19). That is why God has allowed, within certain limits, that the adversary, the world, and the flesh can influence the spiritual life of the individual believer as well as the church.

At the same time, however, God has also taken precautions so that the deceiver cannot cause unlimited damage. In His Word, God has given us many instructions and examples of how to overcome in our spiritual situation. And God has commanded and instituted the watchman's ministry in His church so that God's flock may be properly guarded and protected from harm.

1. The Spiritual Dangers to God's Flock

The spiritual dangers to the church in these times can be traced back to three main influences:

a) The Influence of the Flesh from the Inside

Although the believers are **"in the Spirit"** because the Holy Spirit dwells in them and guides them in principle (Romans 8), they still live in the flesh with its lusts and desires. The influence of the flesh is opposite to that of the Spirit (Galatians 5).

Many believers, unfortunately, are not *spiritual* in their disposition and walk, but *carnal*; the effects of this on the lives of individuals and churches are painful and destructive: worldliness and moral sin, selfishness, inordinate ambition and divisions, resistance to God's guidelines in personal life as well as in the church, susceptibility to heresies and deceptions. This danger is shown to us in the NT especially from the example of the Corinthians and Galatians, but also from the Colossians. The great need of the children of God is that the dangerous influence of the flesh is least perceived by those in whom it is most powerfully active. Here spiritual vigilance and the watchman's ministry are necessary, as well as conviction of the carnal disposition and motivation to a spiritual walk.

b) The Influence of the World from the Outside

The world itself exerts a seductive influence on the faithful (cf. 1 Jn 2:15-17; James 4:4), in which this anti-God system offers them numerous temptations to leave the narrow path of the Lord to satisfy selfishness: wealth and power, professional success and career, spiritual and sexual temptations. This *seduction* is directed at our spirit (seductive thoughts and teachings of false freedom for the flesh), soul (temptation to spiritual self-realization and lawless satisfaction of needs, etc.) and body (temptations to lawless satisfaction of sexuality, other debauchery of a bodily nature). The other side of the world's influence is the *persecution* of believers, intimidation through attacks on spirit (ideas at enmity with God), soul (pressure and intimidation) and body (threat and infliction of bodily harm). Again, the pernicious, paralyzing influence of the world and the dangers it entails are barely noticed in the church by the many who have already succumbed to it, who are worldly to a certain extent. Warning and a wake-up call are urgently needed here.

c) The Influence of Satan and the Evil Spirits from the Invisible World

The influence of the adversary is principally a danger to the church (Eph 6; 2 Corinthians 11), but in the end times it takes on ever greater dimensions (1 Tim 4:1-5; 1 Jn 4:1-6). Not only the Holy Spirit of truth is at work in the church, but also, since the time of the Apostles, the antichrist's *spirit of error* (1 Jn 4:3, 6), which exerts its influence mainly through *false prophets* (1 Jn 4:1-6; Mt 7:15-23; Matthew 24) and through *false teachers* (2Pt 2:1-3; 2 Jn 1:7-10; 1 Tim 6:3-10; Rom 16:17-20), but also by unrestrained, dissatisfied people who do not have the Spirit and cause divisions (Jude 1:4-19; Tit 3:10-11).

Satan's actions on believers are aimed at the levels of *spirit* (false thoughts and teachings; confusion and delusion), *soul* (darkening, depression or inciting of the emotions to sensual desires), and *body* (certain forms of weakness and illness, influence on desires). For the church as a whole, *seductive teachings* (heresies) and *false prophecies* play a decisive role here, through which the adversary wants to prevent the faithful from following the Lord, from fighting the good fight of faith, and from actively proclaiming the truth.

In addition to the means of spiritual seduction to error (angel of light, 2 Cor 11:14), the enemy also uses those of personal temptation to sin (serpent; 2 Cor 11:3), as well as those of demonically provoked persecution (roaring lion; 1Pt 5:8). The paralyzing, misleading influence of the forces of darkness is perhaps perceived even less by many believers than the other two factors; many behave as if there was no adversary at work in the church. Here, too, the ministry of the watchman is needed, which warns the faithful and makes them aware of the dangers.

2. The Pastoral Ministry as God's Instrument to Protect His Flock

The spiritual struggle for the preservation and edification of His church is fundamentally the task of *all believers*. Thus, all believers are also basically instructed to watch over the spiritual state of their own lives and the local (as well as entire) church and to participate in the watchman's ministry within the framework of their respective gifts and responsibilities.

But God has also given special ministries and gifts for the edification of the body of Christ: on the one hand, the shepherds, teachers, and evangelists who serve the body beyond the confines of a local setting

(Ephesians 4), on the other hand, the local elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, 1 Peter 5). All these services can be defined in a comprehensive sense as the *pastoral ministry*.

The pastoral ministry in the church is exercised by men of God who are called and gifted by the Lord for it; the task is to cooperate, under the direction of the Supreme Shepherd, in *guarding* the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Pt 5:2). This guarding of the flock consists with “real” shepherds, among other things, in the manifold care for the healthy growth and the good nourishment of the flock, but also in the anticipatory defence against possible dangers such as diseases, invading wolves, etc.

Every biblical pastoral ministry is also a watchman’s ministry; the care for food and the prospering of the flock and the defence against destructive dangers cannot be separated from each other! This is certainly the reason why we do not read anything about special “watchmen” in the NT, as the prophets were especially in the OT (Ezek 3:17; Ezek 33:1-9; Isa 56:10); on the other hand, the Old Testament watchman’s ministry is certainly recorded as a model and admonition for those who do the pastoral and the watchman’s ministry in the church (1 Cor 10:6-12). We will discuss this in section 3.

According to God's plan, the primary responsibility of the pastoral and watchman’s ministry is given to the elders and overseers of the local church. A key text that makes clear the importance of the watchman’s ministry in the context of the general pastoral and overseer ministry is the Apostle Paul's speech to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:28-32:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood! For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I command you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Through this prophetic word of the Apostle, God Himself imposes a sacred duty on every local elder, which he must exercise with full commitment and regardless of his personal comfort, tranquility, or well-being. God will one day demand an account of his vigilance and his “watching for the souls” under his care (Heb 13:17)! Titus 1:9-14 also teaches unequivocally that the defence against heresies and spiritual corruption is one of the indispensable duties of the local overseer:

Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convince those who contradict. For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. One of them, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons!” This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

This includes Titus 3:9-11: **“But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”**

The edifying ministries for the whole body according to Ephesians 4:11-16 have a complementary, equipping function for the local communities (“for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ”, Eph 4:12). They also share in the watching aspect of the pastoral ministry, as indicated in Ephesians 4:14.

The watchman’s ministry, in the context of the teaching and preaching ministry beyond the local sphere (evangelist, shepherd and teacher are all included here, in my opinion), is probably most clearly taught and shown in the 1st and 2nd epistle to Timothy. Timothy was, according to his duties, both a supra-local teacher and an evangelist according to Ephesians 4:11 - in any case, not “the first bishop of Ephesus”, as the Catholic tradition would have it. That he had a pronounced teaching and preaching ministry is proven by some passages in both epistles to Timothy (compare with 1 Tim 4:6-16; 2 Tim 2:2; 2:14-15; 4:1-3). Even if one only wants to assign him the evangelistic ministry, Paul's instructions to him also points the way for the watchman’s task of the teaching and pastoral ministry.

Already at the beginning of **1 Timothy**, Paul confronts Timothy with the task of warding off foreign teachings and corrosive influences in Ephesus (**1 Tim 1:3-11**). In **1 Timothy 3:15**, the Spirit of God shows us the importance of the watchman's ministry indirectly by pointing to the high calling of the church of the living God to be "*the pillar and ground of the truth.*" **1 Timothy 4:1-16** is also about fending off heresies, and Timothy is exhorted to fight them with admonitions and teachings in order to strengthen and preserve believers (**1 Tim 4:16**). Additionally, the exhortations in **1 Timothy 6** (esp. **V. 13-16** and **V. 20-21**) are clearly connected to the defence against heresies (cf. **V. 3-10**).

In **2 Timothy** we find the struggle for the preservation of the inspired Word and sound doctrine already in **1:12-14**. A clear instruction for warding off heresies can be found in **2:14-26**. The whole **3rd chapter** has as its framework the defence against end-time corruption (**3:1-9, 13**) through the sound teaching of the inspired Scriptures (**3:14-17**). The admonition to proclaim the Word of God without compromise is strongly emphasised in **4:1-5**, which is deliberately contrasted with the end-time openness to heresies.

In addition to these very clear instructions for servants of the Word, there are numerous other hints in the NT that I can only touch on. Examples of the watchman ministry, a reminder and the correction of errors can be found in particular in **1 Corinthians 10:3-6; Galatians 1:6-10; Galatians 2:4-14; Galatians 3:1-5; Galatians 4:8-20; Galatians 5; Ephesians 5:6-14; Ephesians 6:10-20; Philippians 3:17-21; Colossians 1:24-2:23; 1Thessalonians 4:1-8; 2Thessalonians 3:6-14; Titus 1:9-2:15; Titus 3:8-11; Hebrews 3:7-19; Hebrews 4:1-12; Hebrews 5:11-6:12; Hebrews 12:12-29; James 2:1-26; James 3:13-5:6; James 5:19-20; 2 Peter 1:12-2:22; 2Peter 3:1-18; 1 John 1:5-10; 1 John 2:9-27; 1 John 3:4-12; 1 John 4:1-6; 1 John 5:1-13; 2 John 1:7-11; 3 John 1:9-11; Jude 3-22; Revelation 2:2-7; 2,14-16; 2,20-25; 3,1-4; 3,7-11; 3:15-20.**

The whole ministry of the Apostle Paul himself, and the confrontation with heresies and pernicious influences as we find them in his letters, is an impactful example and a reminder for every servant of the Lord not to neglect this aspect of his ministry (see below).

3. Old Testament Models for the Pastoral and Watchman's Ministry

We find in the OT numerous examples of the spiritual pastoral and watchman ministries, given to us for instruction, encouragement, and warning (**1 Cor 10:6+11-13; Rom 15:4**). In the OT it is equally true that every shepherd and leader in the people of God also had the Lord's charge to watch over the people and to avert harm from them, to judge wrongdoing and to put away evil.

The main spiritual danger for the holy people of the Old Covenant, besides the natural inclination towards self-confidence, self-righteousness and disobedience to God's commandments, was the *intermixing with the Gentile peoples and the adoption of their idolatry*. The LORD had already issued clear warnings against this seduction through Moses (e.g. **Ex 23:20-33; Ex 34:11-17; Lev 20:1-8; Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 4; Deut 6:10-19; Deuteronomy 7; Deut 12:1-8+30-31; Deuteronomy 13**).

Moses himself was called to watch against these deviations and to act against them as the shepherd of the people. He is a very impressive example of a spiritually minded shepherd and watchman. His first test came very soon after the covenant at Sinai, when the people had Aaron make a golden calf and celebrated a gruesome idol while he was in the presence of God on the mountain (**Exodus 32**).

We first see Moses' priestly intercession for the strayed people (**Ex 32:11-14+30-32**) - a very important quality of every shepherd who has to watch is this attitude of asking for mercy and grace and standing in intercession before God for His people.

In contrast, we then see that Moses intervened strictly and sharply to judge sin in the people (**Ex 32:15-29**), up to the call to the believers to execute judgment on all the transgressors, even those who were close to them (in this point many shepherds in the people of God fail!). Moses himself had to reproach and resist the deviations of the people at other times, especially in the uprising of Korah's mob (**Numbers 16**).

Also noteworthy is the invasion of idolatrous seductions into the people of Israel, which came about due to the counsel of Balaam, where the people mixed with the Gentiles in fornication for the first time and then also allowed themselves to be drawn into spiritual fornication, that is, into idolatry (**Numbers 25**). Here, too, the Lord commands a sharp judgment for the sinners; however, it is not clear whether these instructions were really followed. In any case, a leading man from the Simeon tribe dares to commit fornication with a Midianite woman in front of everyone's eyes.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, stands up and kills the two transgressors. Only in this way was the judgment of God averted from the Israelites, and the LORD praises the zeal of Phinehas before everyone and emphasises once again that it is precisely his decisive action against sin in God's people that saved them from judgment. Thus, Phinehas is an important example for the New Testament watchman ministry - although it goes without saying that the NT equivalent can only be about taking a determined spiritual action against evil and, if necessary, an exclusion of the transgressors from the community of the church.

Moses' successor Joshua is also a model of the spiritual shepherd's ministry through his determination to serve the Lord faithfully, even if all others should choose different gods, and through his courageous warnings to the people (**Joshua 23 and 24; especially 24:15**). The same is true of Samuel, whose first commission by the LORD was to declare God's judgment over the house of Eli (**1 Samuel 3**).

Later, he calls the people to repentance (**1 Sam 7:1-6**) and faithfully rebukes them for wanting to put a king over them. Resigning his place as judge, Samuel speaks the beautiful word: "**Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way!**" (**1 Sam 12:23**).

Among the kings of Israel there are some, especially *Hezekiah* and *Josiah*, who are role models because of the determination with which they opposed idolatry and the spiritual deviations of the people and sought the Lord with all their hearts (**2 Kings 18-23; 2 Chronicles 29-35**). They zealously sought the honour of the Lord instead of their self-interest and convenience. The Lord stood by them and, under their leadership, gave revival and renewal to the people of God.

It is also exemplary how, for example, *Jehoshaphat*, as leader of the people, accepted the rebuke of a prophet and allowed himself to be admonished and afterwards served God well again (**2 Chr 19:1-7**). The scribe Ezra is a beautiful example of the pastoral and the watchman's ministry. He took the mixing of the returned remnant with the Gentiles so seriously and humbled himself before God because of the sins of the people, that the damage could be healed one more time. He roused the sinners out of their sleep, and God gave repentance (**Ezra 9-10**).

Especially important for the pastoral and watchman's ministry of the church is the book of *Nehemiah* and the example of this faithful, selfless servant of the LORD. He was awakened by the Lord for the cause of His people when the temple was already built. Nehemiah's concern was the wall around the holy city of Jerusalem. He understood that the service to the LORD could only be done in God-pleasing integrity and faithfulness when the *wall of separation* from the Gentile peoples, which lay in ruins, was rebuilt.

This is precisely the spiritual aim of the watchman's ministry of God's people: *the church of God should be shielded from the errors and seductions of the enemy and separated from them so that they can serve the Lord in holiness and integrity and fulfil their priestly calling*. The "wall around Jerusalem" is not an end in itself, but it serves to permit the undisturbed and constant offering of pleasing sacrifices in the temple of God!

Nehemiah is also a role model in many details, e. g. as he sets up guards during the construction work and thus, figuratively speaking, combines vigilance and defence with edification (**Neh 4:3+10-17**). Nehemiah was a model of soberness and vigilance against the cunning of enemies (**Nehemiah 4 and 6**) and showed exemplary fearlessness and decisiveness in speaking out against the sins of the people, including the great ones among them (**Nehemiah 5 and 13**). Particularly encouraging is the consequent revival given to God's people (**Nehemiah 8 - 9**).

Where the leadership of the people failed, the *prophets* were especially called upon as shepherds and watchmen. Their ministry is in a very special sense that of a watchman, and we can learn a lot from it for our pastoral task and role as watchman today, especially in the proclamation of the Word, which also plays a central part in the watchman's ministry.

The prophets had to do their duty as watchmen mostly in a spiritual situation where neither the people nor the shepherds and leaders of the people were willing to listen to God's warnings and calls for repentance. To one of them, Ezekiel, this commission was given comprehensively and explicitly:

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me: When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. (Ezek 3:17-19).

This is a very serious word, and we are inclined to limit it to the AT; but there is a rather clear relationship with this passage in Acts 20:26-27, which shows that Paul also knew about the great responsibility of his ministry.

We can learn from the prophets the audacity and uncompromising nature of the watchman, who calls the harm of God's people by its name and takes action against it, even if he is (almost) alone. *Elijah* is particularly emphatic here as he confronts the renegade people on Carmel and challenges them: *"How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him!"* (1 Kings 18:21). It is instructive how the leaders, entangled in half-measures and sins, want to blame the warner *Elijah* and accuse him: *"Is that you, O troubler of Israel?"* (1 Kings 18:17).

There is also much to be learned from *Elijah* regarding the spiritual challenges and dangers to which a servant of God is subjected (2 Kings 19). The courage of the prophet *Micah* is also exemplary, who stands before *Ahab* and *Jehoshaphat*, in the face of 400 false prophets who prophesy peace and success to the kings, and who nevertheless prophesies the coming judgment of God.

The great pressure on the watchmen of God's people is made clear by the words of the servant who appoints *Micah*: *"Now listen, the words of the prophets with one accord encourage the king. Therefore please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak encouragement!"* (2Chr 18:12). Even today, some pragmatic believers prefer to hear "positive messages" and react to the watchmen of God's people in a similar way to *Ahab*: *"I hate him, because he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil"* (2Chr 18:7).

The most impressive example of a faithful watchman in difficult times is certainly the prophet *Jeremiah*, who had a particularly trying ministry. Through him, the Lord had to reproach his people: *"Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'"* (Jer 6:17).

In his day, no one wanted to listen to the watchman's call and the warnings of the Word of God. The leaders of God's people were trapped by a deadly indifference: *"For the shepherds have become dull-hearted, and have not sought the LORD; therefore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks shall be scattered."* (Jer 10:21). The LORD had to speak severely about them, because they had neglected the flock and let them go astray:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: "You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings," says the LORD. (Jer 23:1-2)

This reminds us of the words of warning to the faithless shepherds in Ezekiel 34:4-7:

The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them! So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one was seeking or searching for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD!

Similarly, Isaiah describes the attitude of the leaders of God's people: *"All you beasts of the field, come to devour, all you beasts in the forest. His watchmen are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving slumber."* (Isa 56:9-10).

In this troubling situation, the prophet experienced mainly resistance and persecution when he proclaimed his warning calls. He was slandered, charged, and thrown into prison; they planned to assassinate him. They demanded that he should finally be banned from preaching.

One climax was the audacity of King Jehoiakim, who burned God's calls to repentance and warnings of judgment through Jeremiah as they were being read to him (**Jeremiah 36**). It had been Jeremiah's desire to serve the Lord and the people as a shepherd (**Jer 17:16**). In the end, it came about as the prophet had predicted with his warnings, and all his adversaries, who did not want to listen to the annoying warner, were confounded.

It remains to be added that in the OT there is also a series of other warning examples of leaders who refused to listen to God's exhortations. One of them is Eli, who, despite God's proclamation of judgment, did not have the strength to resist the ungodly activities of his sons (**1 Samuel 2-4**). King Asa, who was godly by himself, did not want to be rebuked by the prophet Hanani and threw him into prison (**2Chr 16:7-10**).

We read of King Joash, who had Zechariah murdered, the son of the man who saved his life and brought him up, because he had admonished him (**2Chr 24:17-24**); his son Amaziah walked in his footsteps, for when a prophet rebuked him for his idolatry, he threatened him: *"Have we made you the king's counselor? Cease! Why should you be killed? Then the prophet ceased, and said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not heeded my advice!"* (**2Chr 25:16**).

Throughout the OT we find that God also expected from the shepherds whom He called to serve his people, vigilance against all deviations from God and His Word. The good leaders of the people were characterized by decisive intervention as soon as corruption and disobedience against God broke out in the people of God. Only when the shepherds - namely the kings, for the most part - increasingly failed, did God appoint special watchmen, the prophets, to warn the people and call them to repentance.

4. Is the Ministry of Warning and Defense Superfluous?

Repeatedly, in these present times, we meet among leading brothers a hidden devaluation of the warning and the watchman's ministry, based on the argument that it is sufficient or much better to present the believers with the real and positive teaching of the Word of God, instead of dealing with erroneous trends in a warning and instructive way. An example from the banking world has become very popular. Supposedly the experts, for the detection of fake notes, do not deal with the peculiarities of counterfeits, but strive to know the real banknotes as well as possible, so that they can detect counterfeits more easily.

I am not a banking expert and therefore cannot judge whether this example is true (common sense actually tells us that the experts must also be familiar with the tricks of the counterfeiters). In any case, we must study the Bible well before we carelessly transfer this example from the secular business world to the spiritual life of the church.

If one then researches the NT, one quickly realises that in the doctrinal letters of the Apostles we find a close connection between "positive", uplifting doctrine and encouragement on the one hand and "negative" warnings against heresies, deception, and false trends on the other. While in the epistles to the Romans, the Ephesians, and the Philippians, for example, the edifying doctrinal statements strongly predominate, we still find that entire books such as Galatians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, 2nd Peter, 1st and 2nd John and Judas have the defence against heresies and seduction as a basic theme and develop the positive doctrinal statements out of the defence.

It is quite clear that in the spiritual life of the congregations as a whole the teaching and communication of the genuine must occupy the main space. The whole ministry of warning and watching plays a *complementary* role in the building up of the church and contributes to the fact that the saints grow towards

Christ, increase in the full knowledge of Christ, and become spiritually mature. A church in which warning and discernment dominated the preaching would certainly be feeding its congregation inadequately.

However, the writings of the NT show very clearly that, in addition to the positive conveying of the genuine, it is also necessary to warn against the errors and ensure that the enemy's tricks are called by name and refuted by the Word, so that the pastoral ministry is truly fulfilled.

Believers need instruction to recognise and refute the subtle distortions of biblical truth. This is all the more important in today's age of freely available mass media, where especially young believers can come under the influence of seductive heresies through the internet, CDs, books, or magazines, without the shepherds of the local church even suspecting it.

The shepherd who refrains from or even opposes warning against today's end-time seductions and wishes to rest on the fact that the faithful entrusted to him already by themselves recognise when they are being deceived, disregards clear commandments in Scripture and will, I fear, one day be revealed as an unfaithful, negligent shepherd. It is not for nothing that the rebuke is written in Scripture: ***"His watchman are blind, they are all ignorant; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber."*** (Isa 56:10). It is wrong, unbiblical, and dangerous to downplay or deny the importance of the watchman's ministry and warding off seduction.

5. The Motive and Attitude of the Watchman's Ministry

Like any ministry, the spiritual watchman's ministry should be done from the heart as for the Lord, out of love for our Lord Jesus Christ, who saved us through His sacrifice on the cross. The watchman's ministry should be spurred on by the desire for the Lord to be glorified by a pure and holy church that lives and serves in faithfulness and devotion to Him. We find the spiritual disposition of the watchman so beautifully expressed in Paul's confession: ***"For I am jealous of you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."*** (2 Cor 11:2).

This is precisely what the pastoral and watchman's ministry is all about: to ensure that believers bought by the blood of Jesus Christ serve their Lord and Bridegroom in integrity, faithfulness, and simplicity, that they live for Him and are not drawn away from their first love and simplicity toward Christ by the seductions of the enemy (2 Cor 11:3-4). We find this attitude in Paul (cf. Acts 20:19-31; Gal 4:19-20), but also in Peter (2 Pt 1:12-15; 3:1-18) and John (1 Jn 2:18-26; 3:2-8) as well as in the Old Testament role models. In addition, we must be willing to endure suffering and disappointment, resistance, and evil slander for the Lord's sake.

Especially in this day and age, we need men of God for the pastoral and watchman's ministry who combine love, patience and humility with boldness, determination, and steadfastness in the fight for the cause of the Lord. They should be free from sectarianism and a partisan spirit, but clearly and resolutely fight the end-time seductions and both watch over and feed God's flock and ensure that it can rest in Christ and grow spiritually. It should be the prayer request of all of us, that the Lord raises up such brothers and strengthens those who are already ministering thus.

B. The Spiritual Battle for the Faith in the End-time Church

The watchman's ministry can also be summed up with the important exhortation of Jude, which asks us to: "***contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints***" (Jude 1:3). Scripture clearly shows that this task (also called "apologetics", i.e. defence of the faith) increases in importance and scope in the advancing end times, because the deceptions in the church are increasing more and more.

We discover this in the prophetic statement of **2 Timothy 3:13**, which is to be seen in the context of **2 Timothy 3:1** ("***But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come***"): "***But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.***"

The period before the Lord's return, as we have already mentioned in the introduction, will be marked by increasing deception, especially false prophecy (**Mt 24:4-5; 11-12; 23-25**).

The main spiritual danger in this last, increasingly clear pre-Antichrist period, is seduction, i.e. Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and sends false prophets and teachers into the church who, in a "Christian" disguise, spread a fake Christianity and misleading teachings (always cleverly mixing these with true statements). These people, who have "***crept in unnoticed***" (Jude 1:4), cause disruption of faith (**2 Tim 2:18**), yes, apostasy (**1 Tim 4:1-2**), divisions and partisanship (**Rom 16:17; 1 Tim 6:4-5; Tit 3:10-11; Jude 19**).

It is of particular importance for the watchman's ministry that we pay attention to the *spiritual background of seduction*, namely that it is a *work of seductive spiritual powers*, which also explains the fascination, the great power, and the prevalence of these false ideas. Here **1 Timothy 4:1-2** is a key: "***Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.***"

Unfortunately, this is not clearly seen today by many responsible brothers (in the local churches and supra-local associations and ministries); they view seduction on a purely human level and also confront it by human means; however, the watchman's ministry cannot be done effectively with this, and so the church is not properly protected from being misled.

For the biblical battle to defend the faith it is necessary that we know who our opponent is and on which fronts he attacks with which tactics. The Bible clearly shows that our battle is not directed against flesh and blood; our opponent is ultimately the devil! **Ephesians 6:10-20** should be heeded in respect to this spiritual battle:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual (hosts) of wickedness in the heavenly [places].

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Above all, taking the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The ministry of defending the faith, then, is ultimately not directed against people; under no circumstances can our opponents be any true believers, even if they are influenced by false teachings and resist the watchman's ministry. It is a *spiritual battle* in which we pull down thought fortresses and false teachings through the preaching of biblical truths, through the work of spiritual persuasion, as **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** teaches us:

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

In doing so, we may have to openly resist and expose false teachers, false prophets, and sectarian people where they are causing harm in the church (cf. **Tit 3:10-11**; **Gal 2:4-5**; **2 Cor 11:13-15**), but we should meet all true believers in an attitude of patience, gentleness, and exhortation to convince them and, wherever necessary, to correct them.

1. The Deceptive Offensives of the Enemy in the Fight for the Faith Today

In order to effectively defend against the end-time seductions, we need to know how and where the enemy mainly attacks the church. What are the main incursions of the end-time seduction in the church? At least for the "Christian West", five essential areas can be clearly identified:

a) Criticism of the Bible: Dissolution of the Authority of Sacred Scripture by Human Wisdom

Satan, through philosophy (**Col 2:8**) and human wisdom (**1 Corinthians 1 and 2**), seeks to attack the authority, perfection, and inerrancy of God's Word and lure the church away from childlike faith in God's Word of revelation (the Bible).

To this end, he uses the lust for glory and carnality of some believers who seek academic relevance and recognition, as well as the widespread belief in science that many of God's children have. Especially the *criticism of the Bible* (the denial of the complete inspiration, inerrancy, and perfection of the Holy Scriptures by modern theology) is the core of this line of seduction, which also includes the advance of psychology, the denial of the 6-day creation, etc.

We have to watch the effects of Bible criticism on Bible translations and especially the modern "dynamic equivalent" Bible versions. Today we see how criticism of the Bible infiltrates and eats away at many evangelical Bible schools thirsting for academic recognition. Baptists, Methodists, and evangelical free churches are already largely contaminated by criticism of the Bible through their seminars; similarly contaminated are a wide circle of regional church communities. These developments do not stop at the "Brethren Movement" either.

b) The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement: Seduction through False Prophecy and Mysticism

Satan tempts believers and so-called Christians to reach out for falsely prophetic revelations (**Mt 7:15-23**) and mystical "spirituality" (**Col 2:16-23**), which is in fact spiritualism, i.e., fellowship with demons (**1 Cor 10:20**) and misleading, false revelations. This is not only about erroneous teachings and eccentric piety, as some believe, but about the effect of deceitful spirits (**1 Tim 4:1**; **2 Cor 11:4**). These include above all the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movement, but also mysticism, meditative currents such as Taizé, etc. This achieves a destruction of the biblical faith and the authority of the Bible, as well as an opening of evangelical Christians to ecumenism and the Whore Babylon.

This trend of seduction has also reached and infiltrated large circles of the formerly Bible-believing churches. The Evangelical Alliance has opened up completely to the charismatics; in other evangelical circles their influence is on the rise, while it has been firmly established in the major churches, in Baptists, and Methodists for decades. Many "brethren assemblies" are also beginning to open up to charismatic influences.

A special role is played everywhere by the charismatic songs, which have already penetrated many churches as forerunners and door-openers for seductive influences and are sorely underestimated by many in their dangerousness.

c) Ecumenism: Seduction by False "Unity"

The enemy works with great power to draw evangelical circles, including true believers, into the great, ungodly unity of ecumenism and thus the Whore Babylon of the end times. To this end he uses, among other things, the destruction of the authority of the Bible, the opening to false prophecy, the dissolution of biblical teaching. His goal is to weaken the church as a *"pillar and ground of the truth"* and to distort its testimony.

The true church is to be lured out of its divinely ordained separation (2 Cor 6:14-18) and thus to become corrupt, powerless, and useless for God - the same tactic, by the way, which he also used with the people of Israel (cf. inter alia. Rev 2:14; Numbers 25; Josh 23:12-13; 2Chr 18:1-3; 19:2).

The most important argument is the distortion of John 17 - all nominal Christians are to become "one" so that the world can be won over to Christ and a questionable "world peace" can be achieved. This false "Christian ecumenism" leads with frightening consequence into the "ecumenism of the world religions", which is the foundation of the end-time Whore Babylon.

d) Falsified Evangelism: Seduction by Another Gospel

The enemy spreads in Christendom - even among the "evangelicals" - another falsified "gospel" (Gal 1:6-10; 2 Cor 11:4), in which essential elements of the biblical gospel are missing or distorted. This begins with the modern "evangelical" gospel, in which the wrath and judgment of God, the complete depravity of the sinner, the sole saving power of the blood of Jesus Christ is increasingly ignored, in which more and more humanistic elements emerge.

This subtle falsification of the gospel goes further when the power of Jesus Christ's death on the cross is no longer proclaimed, when grace is mixed with works, to the point where the Lord Jesus Christ is no longer recognised as the Son of God, and a degenerate "social" or "psychological" gospel is spread. (This also includes Robert Schuller's heresy of "positive thinking", which is now also being spread in Europe.)

Today we are witnessing an appalling opening of formerly biblical circles to liberal theological and Catholic falsifications of the biblical gospel, including "sacramentalism" (salvation through church sacraments such as infant baptism). The fruit is the occurrence of many spurious conversions in evangelical churches, a surrender of evangelical foundations of faith and the opening to ecumenism through evangelism.

e) Worldliness: Seduction to Conform to the World

The enemy tries to paralyze the church spiritually by tempting it to love the world (James 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15-17) and to conform to the world (Rom 12:1-2). The enemy thereby deprives the faithful of their integrity and spiritual strength, their holiness, and their 'salt' character; he leads them to spiritual fornication.

The wonderful calling of the church as a holy priesthood is to be destroyed, the spiritual temple of the church is to be desecrated by secularization. Here a broad seduction takes place in today's world, which also includes the abandoning of biblical principles in the questions of women and divorce, in the modesty of clothing and interaction, the advance of television, video, internet media, and much more.

Seduction movements in this direction include "Willow Creek", Rick Warren's "Purpose-driven Church", the "Church Growth Movement" and the charismatic movement. This front is not as sharply definable as the

others, but it is basically just as important. Worldliness makes the church superficial and spiritually blind to the will of God (**Rom 12:2!**), so that the faithful open themselves more easily to other seduction trends.

2. The Roots of Spiritual Harm in the Church

Why is it that the seductive trends described above attract so appallingly many Christians who have once made an "evangelical", Bible-believing confession and come from churches with a "good tradition"? How does it come to the landslide-like spiritual deterioration trends that many Bible-believing Christians observe with concern today? It is not easy to fathom the causes of this spiritually; we should all stand before the Lord and ask Him to give us light here. Some thoughts may help to clarify:

A fundamental problem in today's Bible-believing circles is certainly that we - at least the vast majority of us (and the author counts himself among those) - are not in the first love for Christ, that we lack the simplicity and unconditional devotion to our wonderful Lord, the burning zeal to serve the Lord, to live to His glorification and to follow Him, even if it comes with a price.

Unfortunately, in us is found much superficiality, adaptation to this world, pragmatism, lukewarmness, and carnal living for ourselves. We believers in the "Christian West" have been somewhat jaded and corrupted in our minds by material abundance, combined with the absence of open persecution (**2 Cor 11:2-3!**).

In addition, a superficial, truncated "light Gospel" has been proclaimed in Bible-believing circles for many decades, which is characterized by Billy Graham and the "Four Spiritual Laws" of Bill Bright, and by a shortening and also partial falsification of the biblical statements about the corruption and damnation of the sinner, and about the holiness and the judgment of God's wrath. They no longer trusted the power of the Word of the Cross and the work of the Holy Spirit, but persuaded people to "repent" by mental means.

A mere confession of sin and an (often merely repeated) "prayer of surrender" has been confused with a biblical conversion and new birth. Thus, one has produced "believing Christians" without clear knowledge of sin and repentance, without genuine fear of God and breakup of 'self', without real submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the will of God, without a real indwelling of the Spirit and genuine sanctification.

These counterfeit "born-again evangelical Christians" have no real spiritual life of faith; they prefer a humanistically softened, modern conception of God, a God who "accepts them as they are." They do not have a desire for a genuine surrender of their life to Christ and for the biblical discipleship of Christ, which is always a taking up of our cross, but they want an attractive, exciting life as a Christian in which they can "involve themselves" and do not have to renounce the world.

Nor are they hungry for real spiritual food, for the heavenly manna, for the clear preaching and sound teaching of the Word of God. Instead, they desire the meat pots of Egypt; they want humanly softened food, varied 20-minute sermons spiced with jokes, tips for success, and humanistic-psychological, worldly wisdom, in which at no account anything "negative" or challenging may occur.

This development, which is basically tantamount to a creeping apostasy from the true biblical faith, is juxtaposed with another fact to which far too many evangelical Christians turn a blind eye: **there is in our last time an increasing, more serious, and more comprehensive judgment at the house of God, as it is written:**

For the time has come for the judgment to begin at the house of God; but if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "if the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1Pt 4:17-18)

We must also understand the incursion of the seductive trends of criticism of the Bible, "charismaticism", and ecumenism into the ranks of Bible-believing Christians as a judgment of God on our lukewarmness and complacency, on our lack of faithfulness, fear of God, and devotion.

It is a serious fact that when such spiritual grievances prevail, God can allow seduction and corruption to afflict and shake (yes, even destroy) churches and church associations. God can very well give haughty, complacent, and unrepentant Christians over to various devastations; he can allow spiritual blindness and the going downhill of entire circles, which once stood very well, into “charismatic” and ecumenism.

The development of Wim Ouweneel and numerous Dutch brethren churches should be mentioned here as a cautionary example. The fact that a leading man of the “Brethren Movement” and teacher in Bible-believing churches, such as Wim Ouweneel, let himself be so seduced that he now officiates as a practicing charismatic with healing gifts and sits at the feet of an African shaman and deceiver should give us food for thought.

The fact that more and more Christians from Evangelical Alliance churches simply no longer perceive the spiritual danger of ecumenism, criticism of the Bible, and “charismatic”, which was still clearly recognised 30 or 40 years ago, and willingly open up to this seduction trend, is another serious example. Where God once has given light, and believers no longer want to know anything about this light, they can fall into a very great darkness!

That is why today we can only fulfill the pastoral and the watchman’s ministries with blessing, if the basis for this is a sincere, deep, spirit-worked humiliation and bowing in submission before God over these spiritual grievances and needs in the people of God. We must learn anew, like Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, to submissively bow ourselves and identify with the guilt and failure of God’s people, to humble ourselves before God, and to bear sorrow over the failure of us all (**Daniel 9, Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9**).

We should be ready to fast individually and jointly, seeking the face of the Lord so that He may take pity and revive in the midst of the troubling developments of decay and seduction, biblical revival and renewal, penance and a new spiritual beginning, similar to that of the returned remnant of Judah in the time of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Without such submissive bowing and earnest intercession, it is to be feared that the admonitions and teachings of the watchman’s ministry will increasingly fall on hearts with stony ground and deaf ears.

We must learn anew to grasp the spiritual significance which some biblical passages have for our time that deal with such repentance, intercession, and the earnest seeking for the LORD’s face:

When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and when they turn back to You and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication to You in this temple, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back to the land which You gave to their fathers.

When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, when they pray toward this place and confess Your name, and turn away from their sin because You afflict them, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel, that you may teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land which You have given to Your people as an inheritance!

When there is famine in the land, pestilence or blight or mildew, locusts or grasshoppers; when their enemy besieges them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer, whatever supplication is made by anyone, or by all Your people Israel, when each one knows the plague of his own heart, and spreads out his hands toward this temple: then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act (...) (1 Kings 8:33-39)

I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You.

Both my father’s house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I pray, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, “If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; but if you return to Me, and keep My commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the

heavens, yet I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for My name." Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. (Neh 1:5-10)

And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, "Oh, Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgements. Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. O Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as it is this day(...)

Now therefore, our God, hear the prayer of Your servant, and to his supplications, and for the Lord's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate. O my God, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and act! Do not delay for Your own sake, my God, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name! (Dan 9:4-7+17-19)

May the Lord give us the same spiritual attitude of penance and priestly intercession for the people of God! May He wake us up from the sleep of indifference and complacency, rouse us, and open our eyes to the spiritual realities of our time!

May He give us seriousness and determination to step into the cracks of the already vastly devastated Sanctuary of God for the sake of the Lord and His honour! May He give us grace so that we can still rebuild some things that have already been torn down, repair damage in God's house, and bring some strayed sheep back on the right path again!

Without personal sanctification and consecration to the Lord, without earnest prayer and searching for the Lord, however, we are unlikely to see any fruit at this present time. Only on such a personal basis can the struggle for faith decreed to us still be victorious.

3. The Task of Defending the Faith

We have seen above that to us a struggle is delivered: *"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."* (Jude 1:3).

The biblical defence of faith against the end-time seductions means first and foremost to teach biblical truth clearly and comprehensively and let its light shine openly, in the sense of the ministry of Paul, who confesses: *"...how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house (...) Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"* (Acts 20:20+26-27).

To resolutely confront the danger of end-time seduction through tireless, clear, uncompromising teaching and exhortation is the task of all true shepherds in the church who faithfully follow the Lord:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry." (2 Tim 4:2-5)

We are challenged to proclaim the *sound doctrine* of Scripture with forceful determination and clearly, without making any compromises. The church of the end times can only be healthy if, contrary to today's

trend towards experiential Christianity and pragmatism, it attaches great importance to doctrine and doctrinal principles and recognises the important protection that sound doctrine offers against today's seductive powers.

At the same time, the pastoral and the watchman's ministry must also work towards *ensuring that sound doctrine also corresponds to a sound practice, i.e. a God-fearing, devoted life of authentically following Christ, in sanctification and separation from the world.* Without sanctification and a life in practical fellowship with Christ (**Gal 2:20**), even the best doctrinal knowledge does not protect against seduction - for which we have serious illustrations today, for example in the European "Brethren Movement" which is very intent on doctrine.

In addition to the zealous and consistent instruction in the sound teaching of Scripture, we need *targeted instruction in the defence against the most important deceptive trends.* Believers should be equipped to recognise these deceptions and to see through the false teachings. Exactly this is already necessary for the youth and young believers, whom the enemy often particularly takes as his target.

The local overseers of the churches should know the most important seduction trends and be able to refute them biblically. They should take a clear stand on these trends in the churches and provide biblical instruction to the faithful (seminars, brochures, books, lecture recordings). In order to equip the local shepherds and to support this defence, lectures by supra-local teachers and brothers who have a special task or special knowledge in certain areas can also serve.

Of crucial importance is the practice of *biblical separation and church discipline* towards representatives of deceptive trends and people who want to carry false teachings and seductive influences into the churches. Moreover, as shown by **Titus 3:10-11** and the warning against heresy as leaven (**Gal 5:7-10; Mt 16:12**), we must not make bad compromises here because otherwise Bible-believing churches can also be secretly leavened and destroyed by the end-time seduction (cf. also **2 Pt 3:15-17; 2 Jn 2:10-11; 1 Tim 6:5b; 2 Tim 3:5b; Rom 16:17-19**).

Here also, as with moral sin, the principle of **1 Corinthians 5:6-13** applies:

Your glorying is not good! Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. ... But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person!"

In defending the faith, we must carefully distinguish between *seductive and destructive distortions of Scripture*, that is, heresies, on the one hand, and conceptions that stem from *errors of knowledge* on the other hand, human traditions of interpretation, and insufficient spiritual knowledge.

In the face of *heresies*, such as criticism of the Bible, "charismaticism", ecumenism, mysticism, universal reconciliation, Catholicism, salvation through works and sacraments, etc., we as Bible-believing Christians must assume a crystal clear, uncompromising stand. We must refute and expose them objectively, from the point of view of Scripture, and we must make it very clear that there can be no compromise with such seductive teachings and currents.

When it comes to warding off such pernicious influences, church discipline and separation are not only possible, but also, after spiritual efforts for clarification and repentance, biblically required. If we do not take a firm stand here and build a biblical defensive front, then we make ourselves guilty before God because we have allowed corruption and seduction into the flock of God.

On the other hand, we should adopt a level-headed and spiritually balanced attitude to *questions of knowledge* that are not associated with outright heresies. These include, for example, such issues as the rapture of the church before or after the Great Tribulation, the question of whether believers can lose their salvation, whether the church is the bride or Israel, whether pastors are biblical, whether elders should be appointed or recognised, which original text of the Bible is the reliable one, etc.

These questions are not about the defence of the faith handed down once and for all, but about questions of interpretation within the Bible-believing churches, and here different points of view should be consciously tolerated and recognised, even if one may clearly represent one's own biblical knowledge. Here

we should make sure that such issues, as far as possible, do not have a divisive effect and do not prevent cooperation. Anyone who separates at this point or regards differently minded people as enemies and showers them with polemics, irresponsibly tears apart what should actually remain together.

The great need in today's end-time church is that the great task of *contending for the faith delivered to us*, which actually concerns all believers, is today not (or only insufficiently) observed and practiced by many believers, local churches, and church shepherds. Few see that this is linked to the very existence, the survival of the Bible-believing churches in these end times.

Today, a complacent, superficial, pragmatic view prevails in evangelical churches, which haughtily dismisses the determined struggle for faith and against the seduction of the end times as "extreme", "unbalanced" and as craze. Such people think that they do not need this, because the believers are supposedly already sound in faith and doctrine - until the seduction breaks in with power and sweeps hundreds away. This attitude is reminiscent of the church of Laodicea, to which the Lord has to say:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot! So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked - I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see! (Rev 3:15-18)

Many of today's evangelical churches want to avoid the clear, spiritual debate about sound doctrine so as not to bring "unrest" or lose members. They rather make lazy compromises with seductive trends such as the charismatic movement or criticism of the Bible. They would rather close their eyes to the ecumenical tendencies of certain evangelicals and signal approval in order not to be seen as a "narrow-minded fundamentalist".

The pragmatism and the human desire to secure a foul "peace" in the mostly already mixed and deception infiltrated churches causes many evangelicals to devalue and even reject the watchman's ministry. They rather accept that the spiritual substance and the spiritual heritage given by God are gradually eaten up and hollowed out more and more than muster the courage to clearly draw the biblical boundaries again - even if this drives away people who are not decided and sincere or impairs the desired growth in size.

Here it must be stated quite clearly that the biblically practiced watchman's ministry always entails a salutary alarm, an awakening from spiritual sleep. The watchman has the command from God to blow into the trumpet and produce a clear sound so that God's people wake up and recognise the danger, not to entertain the people with delicate, sweet flute tones and lulling them to sleep! However, the biblically practiced watchman's ministry does not bring confusion, fear, and spiritual uncertainty, but ultimately strengthens the faith of those who accept it.

4. Divisions and Separations, Healthy and Pernicious Unity

Pragmatic evangelical Christians often accuse those who value and advocate defending the faith of creating divisions. This accusation is serious and weighty. Certainly, every servant of the Lord should be afraid of arbitrarily bringing divisions or sectarian infighting into the holy church of God.

On the other hand, the Bible teaches that not every unity is pleasing to God and that not every separation contradicts God's will (2 Cor 6:14-18; 2 Tim 2:19-22). Under the conditions of the end-time church, we must examine: Is there a biblically sound unity in a church of true believers who defend biblical doctrine and keep themselves separate from heresies? In such a church, a biblical watchman's ministry will not be divisive, but uplifting and strengthening for the faith. If the watchman's ministry were to be divisive here, it would be a sign that it was not carried out spiritually.

On the other hand, this is different in a mixed church already leavened with deceptions in which the local shepherds have neglected the watchman's ministry. Here it may well be that a biblically founded watchman's ministry creates unrest and leads to separations. The biblical ministry for the defence of the faith

should always work with the means of conviction in order to win over differently minded believers through the Word (cf. **2 Tim 2:24-26**). But if seduced Christians do not want to be convinced, then they may leave a church if it takes a clear stand.

It can also happen in a church that is no longer clearly faithful to the Bible that biblically sincere believers, warned by the watchman's ministry, must leave the church because biblical principles are no longer practiced there. If such a step, after conscientious exhaustion of all spiritual means to arrive at an amicable solution is finally taken in a spiritual manner, it is in the will of God and not a destructive division.

Finally, there is also the danger that the watchman's ministry, if not done in a spiritual attitude and according to biblical principles, can actually have a harmful and divisive effect within the church. The brothers who exercise this ministry have a high spiritual responsibility. Overstrained, unbiblical views, exaggerated and carnal polemics, factionalism, and intolerance in questions of knowledge or personal attacks can harm this important ministry and lead to bad fruits.

Another problem which we must not blame lump-sum on the watchman's ministry is the fact that not all Bible-believing Christians, when warned of end-time seductions, process and pass on these insights spiritually correctly.

Sometimes problems arise because spiritually immature, unbalanced, or embittered brethren deal incorrectly with the clarification about deception they received, and thus cause certain damage to other Christians or in churches. Here the brethren who exercise the watchman's ministry have the responsibility to counter such misalignments preventively as far as possible, convey the right attitude through their example, and at least not incite such aberrations.

On the other hand, in such cases there is sometimes also a failure of the local shepherds involved, who should actually carry in love the spiritual misalignments of such "weak" and carnal believers and help them to overcome them (**Rom 14:1-20**). Sometimes, however, they are quite brusquely and unspiritually rejected or put under pressure because the shepherds do not intervene in a helping and spiritually corrective way, but would prefer to get rid of such "annoying disturbers".

In any case, in view of the end-time plight of the church, one cannot forbid the brethren who perform a watchman's ministry to speak simply because some of their listeners exaggerate or unwisely pass on the justified warnings, thereby creating tension.

The ministry of defending the faith must be practiced, because God commanded it—even if it is met with incomprehension or opposition from many evangelical churches today. It is inevitable that this ministry will have a divisive effect in today's time of evangelical mixing and leavening - however, it is important that it does not entail unbiblical, unspiritual divisions and burdens, but really serves for the edification of the body.

These difficulties should spur all those involved to serve the Lord together in love, gentleness, and humility, in a truly spiritual attitude that sincerely observes the good of the sheep and the commandments of the Lord of the flock and strives to protect God's flock from harm and to ensure together, each in his area of responsibility, that it is properly guided and receives the necessary healthy nourishment to be able to grow. This includes mutual intercession and an earnest searching for the Lord, so that He may guide, bless, and preserve the difficult shepherd's ministry in this day and age.

C. What We Need Today

1. We Need Earnest Prayer for Revival and Preservation!

We do not need any new programs and committees to carry out the task of the watchman's ministry in a well-organised manner. First and foremost, as already seen above, we need a lot of earnest prayer from believers who recognise the harm in God's people and repent over it, who humble themselves because of it and seek the Lord.

The resistance against the end-time seduction trends depends on the one hand on priestly intercession and supplication to the Lord, because these incursions also have a judicial character and we should ask the Lord for His mercy and His gracious intervention. However, it also depends on our prayers, because it is a spiritual battle against forces of darkness that advance the program for the appearance of the Anti-christ. Not only elders and servants of the Lord are called upon here, but every believer who has had his eyes opened.

In this sense, every true believer can be a watchman on the walls of the spiritual Jerusalem, as it is written in the example: *"I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till he establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth!"* (Isa 62:6-7).

Without this solemn, sensible, spirit-led prayer of many awake children of God, the great battle to ward off the end-time seductions in the true church cannot be won. The battle against Amalek in **Exodus 17** reminds us of this! In doing so, like-minded believers should meet regularly as much as possible for prayer, based on the Lord's promise (**Mt 18:19-20**): *"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

We may ask the Lord for grace and mercy that, for the sake of His name, He may put a stop to the powers of seduction, and to correct many more misled people, to give many more a spiritual awakening. We may humbly ask the Lord to give biblical revival in His church in this last hour - not in the sense of the unbiblically enthusiastic visions of "mass revivals", but as an earnest repentance and new surrender of the believers to the Lord.

Such biblical revival means a return to the first love and simplicity towards Christ, new fidelity to the Lord and His Word, the willingness to remain faithful to the Lord and the true Gospel, even through persecution, if necessary, and not to bow down to the anti-Christian powers (i.e. the powers that prepare the coming of the Antichrist) and the Harlot Babylon.

We are allowed to ask the Lord to preserve, strengthen, and bring the small remnant of the faithful to their destination (**Zeph 3:11-13**); that - according to His promise - He will give this remnant an open door that no one can close (**Rev 3:7-13**).

2. We Need Churches Which Fight Vigilantly for the True Faith!

Today, at this time when the adversary is trying to infiltrate, pervert, and destroy the churches truly founded on the Lord and His Word, we must become fully aware of the great importance of local churches faithful to the Bible.

They are more important today than ever as places of true worship of the true God and the Lord Jesus Christ; as places where right priestly service is offered to God; as well-guarded hurdles where the true sheep of the great shepherd can be gathered and protected, cared for and nourished - but also as bearers of a holy, weighty testimony, as attested to in **1 Timothy 3:15**: *"But if I am delayed, I write so that you*

may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

What applies to the church as a whole, also applies to the local churches. In the midst of the increasing darkness and lies of the religious world, the local churches are to be pillars and foundations of God's truth; pillars that tower immovably and bear witness visible from afar to the eternal truths of the Holy Scripture; solid, deeply established, which do not waver, which are built directly on the rock and give firm support.

The local churches, to use another biblical image, are to be shining testimonies, golden lampstands which should still radiate the light of the unadulterated Gospel (**Mt 5:14-16; Revelation 1 and 2**). In the face of this sacred mission, we must be clearly aware of how much the enemy is intent on overturning these pillars and extinguishing the light. The churches must be all the more vigilant and determined in preserving and defending the precious good of the Word of God entrusted to them (**2 Tim 1:12-14**) and ensuring that all believers who stand by them are founded in this truth and are aware of their mission.

It is so important that the bible-believing, local churches and their elders wake up and re-cognize the spiritual dangers of the time we are in. Without such an awakening from spiritual sleep (cf. **Rom 13:11-14; Eph 5:10-17; 1Th 5:1-11; Rev 3:1-3**), many churches that are still in a reasonably good state today will be swept into the end-time seduction swirl, so that the Lord must remove their lampstand away from its place (**Rev 2:5**) and can no longer bless and acknowledge them. Only a church that clearly recognises the dangers of the end times can survive in them.

The churches as a whole and all their members should watch over the sound doctrine and the truth of the Gospel and reject all heresy and falsification of it. This includes that they follow their straight, Bible-believing path spiritually vigilantly and maturely, not driven back and forth by every wind of doctrine.

This includes the churches diligently studying the Bible and upholding sound doctrine without neglecting a holy life and practical fear of God. This includes that the churches as a whole and their members vigilantly observe and judge the end-time developments, that they learn to separate themselves consciously and with biblical reasons and also to counter seduction through prayer. Attention should be paid in detail to the following points:

a) The local churches and their elders should recognize the watchman's ministry as their own task and additionally include the service of supra-local servants in this area. It is very important that the churches do not regard the watchman's ministry as the field of work of some supra-local specialists, but as a self-evident and important part of the local shepherd's ministry and church life, as Scripture also says. The Epistle of Jude teaches that the struggle for the faith is basically incumbent on all believers (**Jude 1:1-3**).

Acts 20:28-31 imposes the watchman's ministry especially on the local elders, which is confirmed by **Titus 1:9**. The elders must be founded in the Word, not only to teach the positive sound doctrine in the churches, but also to convict and rebuke the deceived and those who contradict! To this end, the ministry of supra-local brethren is an important complement and means of equipment which, according to the spiritual understanding of the Body of Christ (cf. **1 Cor 12:14-27; Rom 12:4-8; Eph 4:16; 1Pt 4:10-11**), should be consciously accepted, valued, and used for the edification of the local church.

b) The local churches and their elders should be prepared to face seductive influences in their ranks in a spiritually correct manner. Today, in some churches there is an unbiblical, pragmatic-humanistic way of thinking that tolerates heresy and false spiritual influences or beliefs as long as the people concerned do not appear to make a big fuss about it or cause "problems" in the eyes of the leadership.

This refers to followers of the charismatic movement, where one can hear points of view that a person who speaks in tongues is not a problem for the church as long as he only speaks in tongues at home and not in the assembly, or that the charismatic songs are harmless and can be tolerated. Something similar is heard about supporters of universal reconciliation. "Tolerance" is also often practiced towards Bible-critical and pro-ecumenical tendencies.

We therefore should acknowledge afresh the biblical teaching that such influences are leaven, which must be removed in order to maintain the holiness of the church. This means going after such seduced church members in love, teaching and admonishing them, but also placing them under church discipline, if necessary, in the event that they do not want to let go of their heresies.

c) The local churches and their elders should accept the spiritual watchman's ministry as given by the Lord, accompany it in prayer, and stand behind it. Any genuine, God-given watchman's ministry should be accepted and spiritually supported by believers after they have biblically tested and judged it. A church whose elders or brethren reject such a ministry deprives itself of a blessing and protection intended by the Lord.

Actually, the watchman's ministry should be organically involved in the proper function and edification of the body. That this is largely not the case, but that it is often attacked or at least hushed up and avoided, is an evil in the body of Christ. By succeeding in making local elders, in many circles, insensitive to the watchman's ministry, the enemy can now advance his work of seduction more effectively and broadly. The resulting damage to the church of God and the spiritual responsibility of many local shepherds who refused to listen to the trumpet of the watchmen will be revealed on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. We Need Spiritually Minded Shepherds and Teachers, Who Serve the Lord as Watchmen!

Today, more than ever, there is a need for spiritually alert, prudent overseers and pastors in the local churches who are burning for their Lord, who courageously confront the seductions of the end times and do not turn a blind eye to them. Every shepherd called by the Lord should understand that the protection of the flock from the end-time corruptions is an important and urgent mission of his Lord and prepare himself accordingly.

It takes courage to confront carnal indifference, as well as love and patient persuasion, and a truly spiritual attitude, so that this watchman's ministry may be fruitful for the edification of the body.

The main obstacle today, as we have seen above, is a carnal pragmatism that shies away from the struggle for the faith delivered to the saints and does not follow the guidelines of Scripture, but the humanly feasible and desirable ones. On the other hand, the watchman's ministry must also observe some spiritual principles and lines so that it can bear the right fruit:

a) The Holy Scriptures and sound doctrine must be the basis of all defense of the faith

To execute the watchman's ministry, to defend the faith means to lead believers into the Scripture and its truths, to make them biblically capable of judgment. Not accounts of experiences and opinions achieve this, but serious and solid interpretation and preaching of the WORD.

The watchman harms his ministry if he does not perform it on the safe basis of Scripture. He should also avoid all arbitrary interpretations, extravagant teachings and theories, but argue solidly and comprehensibly from the Bible. It is not he who is the standard of truth, but only God's inspired Word.

Any defence of the faith should lead believers to examine for themselves on the basis of Scripture whether these things are so (Berea, **Acts 17:11**). Only if the believers see through the seductions due to the Bible and are personally founded in sound doctrine, then the defence has created a solid foundation.

b) The servant of the Word must clearly stand up for the truth in the defence of the faith and must not make bad compromises

He needs the power of the Holy Spirit to teach and preach biblical truth, without being diverted one millimeter away from it. He must not compromise on the spiritual issues, even if he is met with great resistance from other believers.

A great example here is the apostle Paul, who not only did not give in to the judaistic "false brethren" for a moment when it came to an important truth of God, but even resisted the "great apostle" Peter to his face (**Gal 2:4-5; 11-14**). Other Old Testament role models can be found in Phinehas (**Numbers 25**) and Nehemiah (**Nehemiah 13**).

To Satan's heresies and seductions there is no yielding, no compromise allowable, but only determined struggle and resistance. Any compromises in the basic questions would lead to the corruption of the church and the failure of the watchman's ministry.

Here the servant of God must learn not to become a servant of men, not to speak for the sake of people or to please people (Gal 1:10). He must not shy away from hostility and slander, but must allow himself to be given courage and relentlessness by the Lord in the spiritual cause of the Lord (cf. Jer 1:6-9; 17-19).

c) The servant of the Word should labour meekly and with conviction in the defense of the faith, without polemics and personal attacks

His ministry is a ministry that only bears the right fruit, if it is practised with a spiritual attitude. Here the admonition of 2Timothy 2:24-26 is especially important:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will."

Abusive speech, exaggerated, unobjective or incorrect accusations, verbal arguments, arrogant behaviour - all this harms the cause of God and should not be found in a watchman. The servant of the Lord must be prepared to patiently endure even the slander and resistance of believers without becoming bitter. He must constantly forgive and pray for those who oppose him.

He needs great prudence and discipline in order not to be drawn into arguments and personal disputes. It is especially bad when different brethren who are part of the watchman's ministry feud with each other and belittle each other in front of the faithful; this causes serious damage to the whole ministry.

d) The servant of the Word, in defending the faith, must have, in everything, in mind the good of the body, the edification of the church, and consciously integrate his ministry in the living organism of the body

Someone who fulfills a watchman's ministry is thus part of the general ministry for the edification of the body of Christ according to Ephesians 4:11-16. In everything he should lead the faithful closer to Christ, proclaim Christ to them, encourage them to lead a spiritual life.

He should always see himself as a servant and helper of the local shepherds and churches, when he is serving beyond his local sphere, and should cooperate with them in a spiritual manner wherever possible. He should strive to avoid and even reduce unnecessary divisions and doctrinal disputes, and to promote the unity of faithful believers wherever possible (Eph 4:1-5).

Although the servant of the Word is responsible for his service only to the Lord and especially for the watchman's ministry urgently needs independence from all bodies, groups, and power apparatuses (Gal 1:1, 10), he should nevertheless do his service as embedded as possible in a spiritual brotherhood that encourages and corrects him.

e) The servant of the Word, who is in the watchman's ministry, must be a person who prays, is always vigilant, and walks in close communion with his Master

The battle for the once delivered faith and the watchman's ministry are in particular areas where the servant of the Lord stands in the firing range of the adversary, who does not like it at all when his tricks are revealed.

Often the watchman stands quite lonely and isolated among his fellow believers, because many- in their spiritual sleep - take offence at him instead of praying for him and supporting him. Thus, it is particularly important that he leads a faithful and regular prayer life and takes special time to pray (cf. among others Mk 13:33; Luke 22:40; Eph 6:18-20; Col 4:2-4+12).

He should learn to fight spiritual battles in prayer and to resist the enemy in faith and to achieve victories; but he also needs priestly-intercessory prayer, which in inflection and penance imputes also to itself the deviations and failures of the People of God, as we know it from Moses, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

He should live in special vigilance, spiritual discipline, and sanctification, so that he does not fall into the pitfalls of the devil and becomes unusable. He especially needs closeness to his Lord, as well as correction and encouragement through the head of the body itself.

4. We Need Love and a Spiritual Attitude in Our Mutual Service for the Lord!

For all of us, for the believers in the local churches, for the shepherds and elders of the churches, as well as for shepherds, teachers, and evangelists working supra-locally, the seduction situation of the end times is a great spiritual challenge.

Only when Bible-believing Christians recognise the danger of our times, and become vigilant, can they escape the paralyzing entanglement in the end-time errors. Only when they understand and accept the biblical watchman's ministry as part of the Lord's task that was given to them, can the Lord preserve and spiritually strengthen them.

In today's situation, there exists the potential danger of the biblical watchman's ministry and the work of edifying the church being torn apart, leading to a confrontation between church elders and brethren in the watchman's ministry, from which only the adversary profits.

Today we all need a spiritual attitude of love, as well as a recognition of the significance and importance of each other in the whole of the body and in its spiritual edification. The "watchmen" need the local churches and the brethren whom God has appointed there as overseers. The local churches, in turn, need the "watchmen" and their ministry.

And we all need more grace from our Lord, and also Spirit-wrought vitalization and revival in our ministry, in our churches. We need a collective searching for the Lord, collective bowing and humiliation, collective fighting and contending in the spiritual battle assigned to us.

The humble orientation towards our common head is crucial. Only our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ can give us unanimity and good cooperation; only He makes us overcomers; only He brings us to His destination.

*But thanks be to God,
who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!
Therefore, my beloved brethren,
be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord,
knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord!*

(1 Cor 15:57-58)