

Guarding Our Inner Life #1

Discernment, Deception, and the Remedy

Introduction

This is the first of a series of studies about why we should guard our inner life and how to do that. In this study, we will consider our feelings, satanic influence, and the renewed mind.

We live in a culture that says "trust your feelings." And while feelings are real and God-given, Scripture presents a sobering picture: the inner life — the heart, the mind, the emotions — is not always a trustworthy guide. Not only is the human heart prone to self-deception on its own, but Scripture clearly shows that satan and his evil angels have both the access and the intent to introduce false impressions directly into the human heart. This study moves in two directions: first, a concise but honest look at the danger — and then, the remedy Scripture provides.

I. The Problem: The Heart Is Not a Reliable Guide

Before we even consider outside influence, Scripture is frank about the condition of the human heart on its own terms.

[Jeremiah 17:9](#) — "**The heart is deceitful above all things**, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

- This is not a peripheral observation — it is a **foundational** one. The heart that generates our feelings, desires, and impressions is described as deceitful above all things. It can mislead the very person it belongs to. We are capable of feeling strongly about something that is completely wrong.

[Proverbs 14:12](#) — "**There is a way that seems right to a man**, but its end is the way to death."

- The word "seems" is doing all the work in that verse. A path can feel right — feel safe, feel justified, feel godly — and still lead to destruction. **The feeling of rightness is not proof of rightness.**

[Proverbs 28:26](#) — "**Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool**, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered."

- Scripture does not soften this. **Trusting our own inner impressions above the counsel of God's word is called foolishness. This is the baseline** — before we introduce any external adversarial influence.
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II. The Greater Danger: satan and His angels Working in the Inner Life

If the heart were merely unreliable on its own, that would be serious enough. But Scripture goes further — it shows that satan and his evil angels have direct access to the inner life of human beings, and that they use that access deliberately.

[John 13:2](#) — "...the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him."

- This is one of the most direct statements in all of Scripture on this subject. The betrayal of Jesus did not originate in Judas alone — **the devil put it into his heart**. What Judas likely felt was his own reasoning, his own impulse, perhaps even a sense of justification. But its origin was outside him entirely.

[Acts 5:3](#) — "But Peter said, 'Ananias, **why has satan filled your heart to lie** to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?'"

- Peter does not say Ananias simply made a bad decision. He says **satan filled his heart**. Ananias's inner life — his thinking, his reasoning, his felt sense of what to do — had been occupied by a satanic influence. The feeling of what seemed reasonable to him was not his own.

[1 Chronicles 21:1](#) — "Then **satan** stood against Israel and **incited David to number Israel**."

- **Incited** — sūth (Strong's #5496): "to allure, to entice, to move, to persuade." This is the language of an internal stirring — a compelling feeling or desire — introduced from outside. David felt moved to act. **That feeling of compulsion came from satan.**

[Ephesians 2:2](#) — "...the prince of the power of the air, **the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.**"

- At work — energeō (Strong's #1754): "to be operative, to work within, to produce effects." This is active, internal operation, **satan's influence** is not merely external pressure — it **works within people, producing effects in their inner life.**

[Ephesians 6:11-12](#) — "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."

- Paul makes clear that **it is not satan alone — it is an organized hierarchy of evil spiritual beings**, ranked and purposeful, all operating within his domain. The warfare they wage is not primarily physical or social. **It is waged in the unseen realm, with the human mind and heart as the primary battlefield.** This army and its structure is worth a careful examination of its own: [satan Has an Organized Army of Angels](#) . But, don't be discouraged because [Jesus also has an Organized Army of Angels!](#)
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III. Discernment: Testing What We Feel

If the heart is already deceitful, and satan with his evil angels can introduce false impressions into it, then the obvious question is: how do we know what to trust? Scripture answers with a consistent call to discernment.

[1 John 4:1](#) — "Beloved, **do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits** to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

- The very fact that we are commanded to test spirits implies that **not every inner impression is what it appears to be.** Something that presents itself as trustworthy — even spiritually trustworthy — **must still be examined.**

[2 Corinthians 11:14-15](#) — "And no wonder, for even **satan disguises himself as an angel of light.** Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness."

- This is a critical warning. satanic influence does not always feel dark or wrong. **It can feel illuminating, compelling, even righteous.** satan's ministers — his evil angels — are capable of the same disguise. A false feeling introduced by an evil spirit may feel entirely positive — which is precisely what makes it dangerous.

[1 Thessalonians 5:21](#) — "...but **test everything; hold fast what is good.**"

- The standard is not how strongly something is felt, but whether it holds up under testing. The instrument of that testing is what the next section addresses.
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IV. The Remedy: The Renewed Mind

The answer Scripture gives to a compromised heart and an adversarial enemy is not feel less — it is think differently. The remedy is a renewed mind, **anchored to God's word**, actively resistant to false impressions.

[2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#) — "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For **the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power** to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and **take every thought captive to obey Christ.**"

- "Take every thought captive" — this is active, deliberate, ongoing work. **Thoughts and feelings that arise in the mind are not automatically granted residency. They are examined, tested against the knowledge of God, and either submitted to Christ or rejected. This is spiritual warfare at the most personal level.**

[Romans 12:1-2](#) — "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, **which is your spiritual worship**. Do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

- **Transformed** — metamorphoō (Strong's #3339): "to change into another form, to be transfigured." The renewal of the mind is not a minor adjustment — it is a **transformation**. And notice **the result: a renewed mind** produces the ability to discern the will of God. Discernment is not a spiritual gift reserved for a few — it is the **natural fruit of a mind that is being renewed by God's word**.

[Hebrews 4:12](#) — "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and **discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart**."

- **The word of God does what we cannot do** for ourselves — it pierces into the inner life and discerns what is actually there. We cannot always trust our own evaluation of our feelings. But when we bring those feelings to Scripture, the **word itself does the diagnostic work**. It separates what is of the Spirit from what is of the flesh — or worse, from what has been introduced by the enemy and his angels.

[Philippians 4:6-8](#) — "...**do not be anxious about anything**, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving **let your requests be made known to God**. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard** your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things**."

- **Guard** — phroureo (Strong's #5432): "to garrison, to keep watch over as a military guard." This is not passive comfort — it is active protection of the heart and mind. And it is maintained by deliberately directing the mind toward what is true. Truth — not feeling — is the anchor.

Summary

The human heart, left to itself, is deceitful and unreliable. That alone is reason enough to hold our feelings up to the light of Scripture rather than simply acting on them. But Scripture reveals something more serious: satan commands an organized hierarchy of evil angels who have both the access and the intent to introduce false feelings, false compulsions, and false impressions directly into the human heart — and they are capable of making those impressions feel entirely natural, even righteous.

The remedy is not the suppression of feeling, but the renewal of the mind. A mind saturated with God's word develops the capacity to discern — to test what arises in the inner life and distinguish what is true from what is false. **The weapons are not emotional — they are divine: the word of God, prayer, and the peace that guards the heart and mind in Christ Jesus.**

We do not stop feeling. We learn to test what we feel — and we do that by measuring every inner impression against the only thing that cannot deceive us: the living and active word of God.

Desiring to live by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah ([Deut8:3: Matt4:4](#))

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