This week, I was really inspired by the first of the Ten Commandments given to us by the prophet Moses and defined in Exodus 20, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (v. 3). Funny enough, the reason I was inspired by this commandment this week in particular was because of a Netflix series I had recently finished. The Netflix series is based on the story of an evil man being caught by his government. He had hurt and killed many people and blamed his actions on being an outcast from society, never appreciated or loved. My culminating thought about the show was a sadness that so many were injured by this man, and that this man felt injured himself. But then, I found that my sadness turned into a deep disdain for evil. After all, it was the belief that man is mortal and capable of all sin that is truly to blame for the pain felt by the man’s victims and the man himself.

After finishing the series, I couldn’t help but think about Mary Baker Eddy’s quotes that pertain to the various “pains and pleasures of material sense” (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 202:6-13). We are often tempted to indulge in the pleasures of matter, but frequently fail to recognize that the root of material pleasure is also the root of beliefs like sickness, injury, accident, and death. We cannot accept one of these beliefs into our life, hoping for material pleasure, without welcoming and perpetuating the associated beliefs for all mankind.

Jesus, addressing his critics, stated “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). Jesus teaches us that evil beliefs are founded on lies and deception. From this, we gather that evil is a “murderer from the beginning” and that “he is a liar.” It makes logical sense then that the pains and pleasures Mrs. Eddy speaks about are not mutually exclusive. You cannot subscribe to the beliefs of pleasure in matter but refute the beliefs of pain in matter.

With this in mind, it’s easy to determine what the pains of matter are; we listed some above – sickness, injury, accident, and death. But what are the pleasures of matter? Why are they grouped in with the pains of matter? These questions ultimately brought me back to the First Commandment.

From my analysis of Mrs. Eddy’s many quotes about the pleasures of matter, I learned that the pleasures of matter can be thought of as the term for the enjoyments we experience that are not of God and His spiritual creation. Both pain and pleasure in matter are derived from breaking the First Commandment. The pleasures of matter are whatever material enjoyments we experience when we agree to worship something other than the one true God as our god. Material pleasures inculcate all instances where we feel material joy as a result of submitting our thought to something other than God. And yet, this is the same root of material pains. Material pain is also the result of worshipping, submitting our thought to something other than God. And thus, we’ve uncovered the lie and the liar. The root of the pain and pleasure of matter are the same - idolatry. When we break the first Commandment, regardless of whether the action(s) brings us material pain, or material pleasure, we’ve turned our face from God and bowed to false material sense.

It was this realization that made me reexamine my commitment to ridding myself of the pleasures of matter. In our simple, and self-justified violations of the First Commandment, we welcome and perpetuate the belief of life in matter for all mankind. As mentioned in the beginning, the belief of life in matter does not bring with it just pleasures, as it also brings pain. In these instances, we have invited the “liar, and the father of it” into our consciousness. We have put our own desires for material satisfaction over the greater spiritual goal of overcoming all evil belief. This is why the First Commandment is so important. If we consistently placed the First Commandment at the forefront of our thought, there would be no stories of the injured and the injurer. The man I mentioned in the beginning would not have felt like an outcast from society, unloved and underappreciated, and those he hurt would not have dealt with the material pains they are believed to have experienced. Thus, I feel that I understand in some degree why Mrs. Eddy declares of herself, “The First Commandment is my favorite text” (*SH*, 340:16).