

Back to Basics with the *Law of God*



A Straightforward Teaching of Orthodox Christianity based upon
the Slobodskoy *Law of God* Study Book

Priest Justin Patterson / Fall 2018

What is the Law of God?

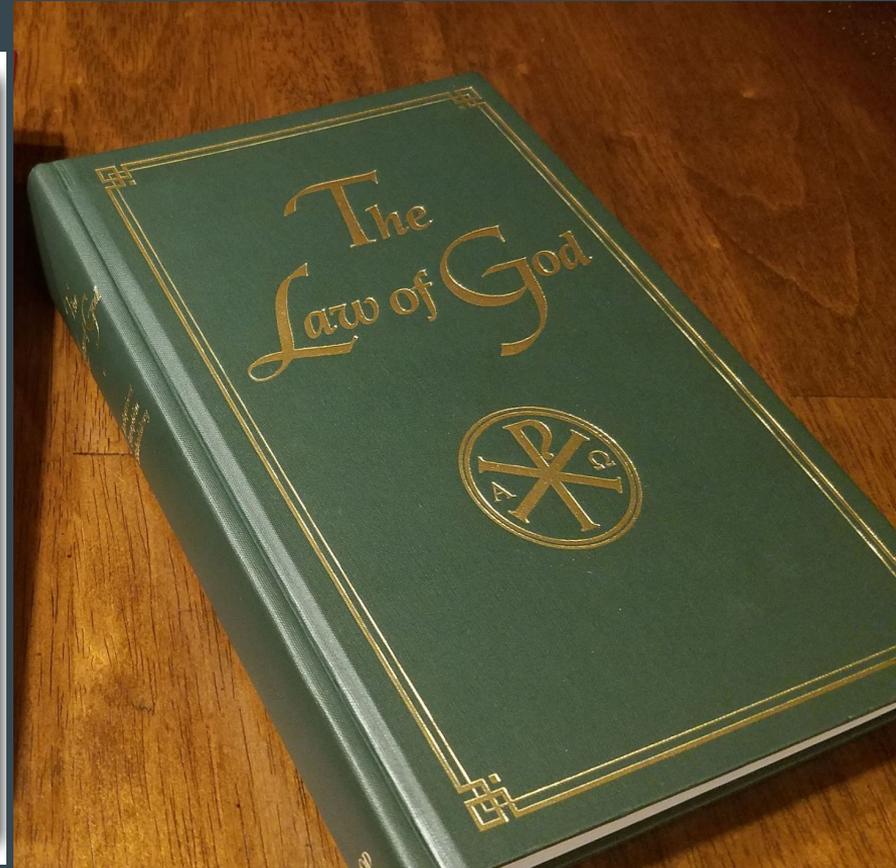
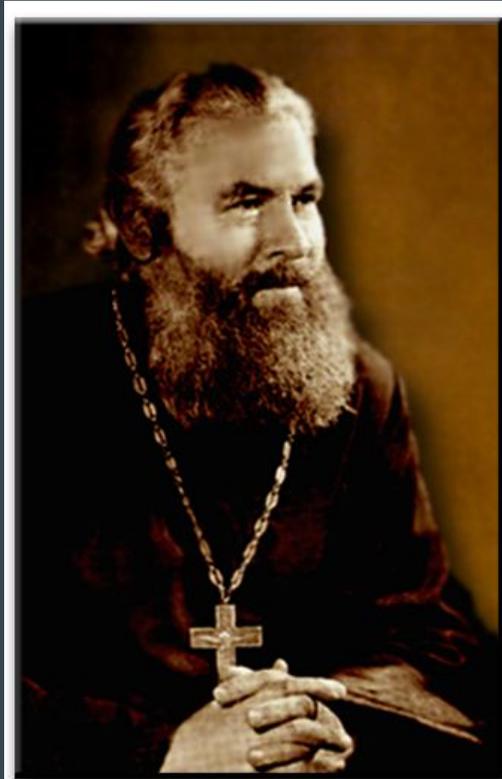
The Law of God

“For Study at Home
and at School”

Compiled by
Archpriest Seraphim
Slobodskoy 1912-71

Holy Trinity Press in
Jordanville

1966; English 1993



But--more generally--what is the Law of God?

But What is the Law of God?

Law of God (Закон Божий)

= Russian Sunday School!

So this book is simply one priest's attempt to put together a “basic” yet traditional Russian Orthodox teaching manual--geared for older children!



So what will be doing in this “Law of God” Series?



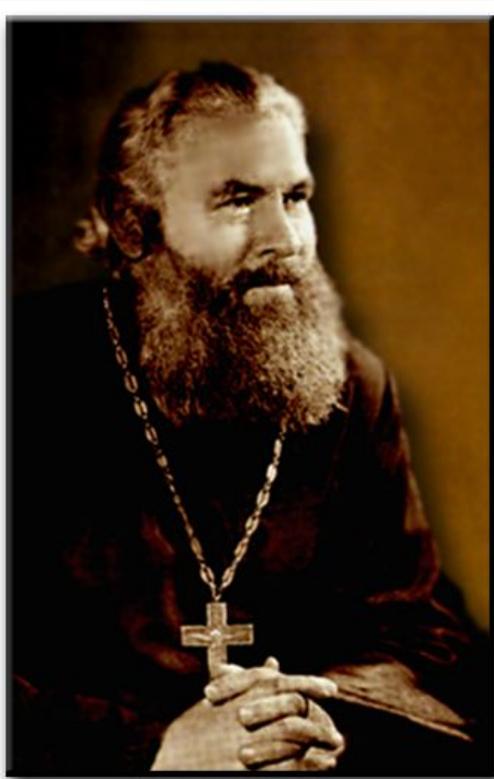
So what will be doing in our Law of God journey?

Going Back to the Basics (like these kiddos!) exploring:

- Who is God? What are His Attributes? What are Prayer & Basic Piety? What about the Church Building?
- Key Old Testament Stories
- Key New Testament Accounts
- Christian Faith and Life
- Divine Worship in the Orthodox Church



A Look at the 1966 Forward to the Russian Edition

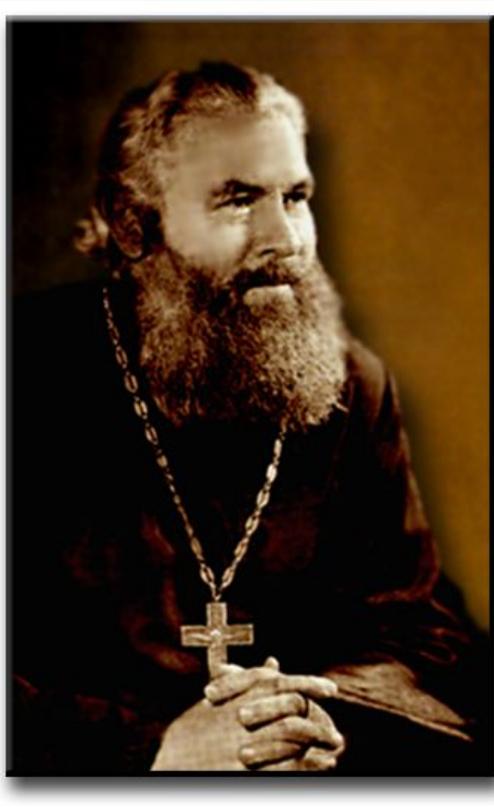


Why emphasize Law of God now? (in 1966)

1. Law of God not a subject in schools (either in Russia or America)
2. Most Orthodox Christians are surrounded by either non-believers or non-Orthodox
3. Very few resources exist for young people (not so true now...)

Parents now (1966) bear the biggest share of responsibility for bringing up young people in the Faith--not the state, or the church apparatus, or the local priest!

A Look at the 1966 Forward to the Russian Edition (part 2)



Fr. Seraphim Slobodskoy voices several strong concerns:

1. Scriptural accounts need to be summarized accurately in books like the Law of God.
2. The Scriptures bear historical integrity.
3. The Scriptures don't always speak historically but in a more poetic sense[e.g., *the account from Psalm 135, p. xii*]
4. Scriptures are “given by inspiration” and in them in “indisputable truth.”
5. Knowledge of Scripture is vital for both defending the Faith and properly holding it.

A Final Thought from the 1966 Forward:

++Ritual is Important!++

Don't mess up the sign of the Cross! (A common theme in many of the old books. This is definitely something that sets the old catechisms apart from the newer books!)

[excerpt on the Sign of the Cross, pp. xiii and xiv]



A word about the English-Language Introduction (1992)

This introduction expresses the basic tension between “academic” Orthodox catechesis and the more “traditional” instruction desired by folks in the Russian Church Outside Russia.

[excerpts on p. xv]

Pastoral Point: we need both!



Part One: Basic Concepts



By the way, here's a question for you:
“Where do you start a catechesis? How
would you start a catechesis?”

- Our ideas for where it should start?
- Where do other catechisms start?
- Where does this one start?

Chapter 1: The World

Chapter 1 simply affirms and glories God as Creator of this beautiful world in which we live. Opening chapter--a prologue almost paraphrasing Psalm 103 (the *proemial* "Psalm of Creation.")

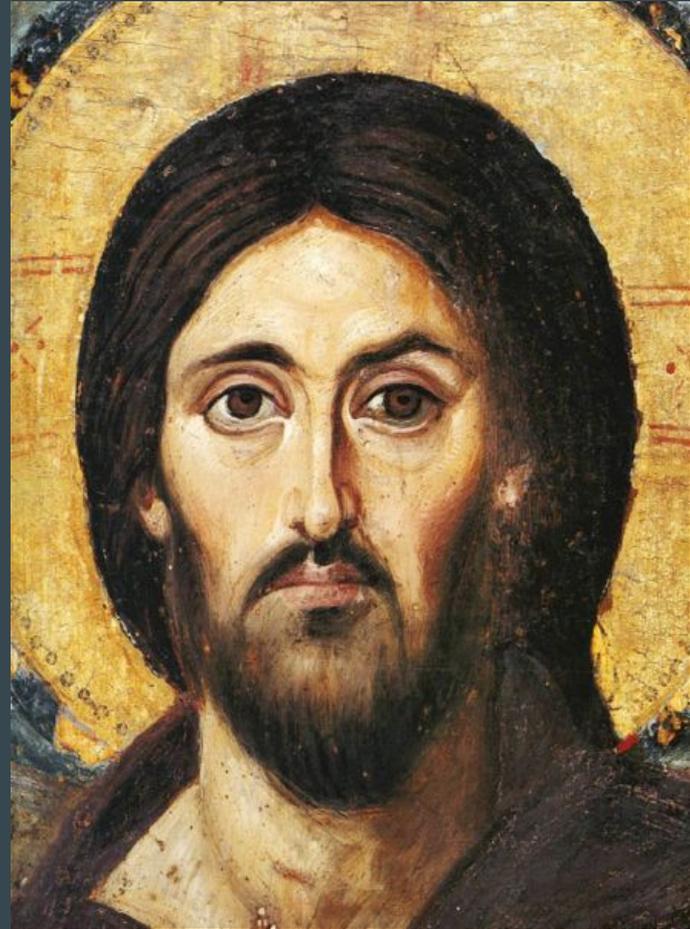
[read entirety of Ch. 1, pp. 3-10]



Chapter 2: About God

Themes in chapter 2:

- Creation *ex nihilo*: God by His Divine Word!
- Inability of man to fully comprehend God
- Centrality of revelation (!) to our knowing God and about God
- Revelation began with Adam and Eve, through the prophets and patriarchs--and culminates in Jesus Christ, the very Son of God!
- [*excerpts, pp. 11-14*]





Chapter 3: The Attributes of God

Father's comment: I realized that these classic "attributes" of God are often dropped in favor of discourses on apophatic theology! But we are wise to remember that the context for apophatic theology is cataphatic theology!

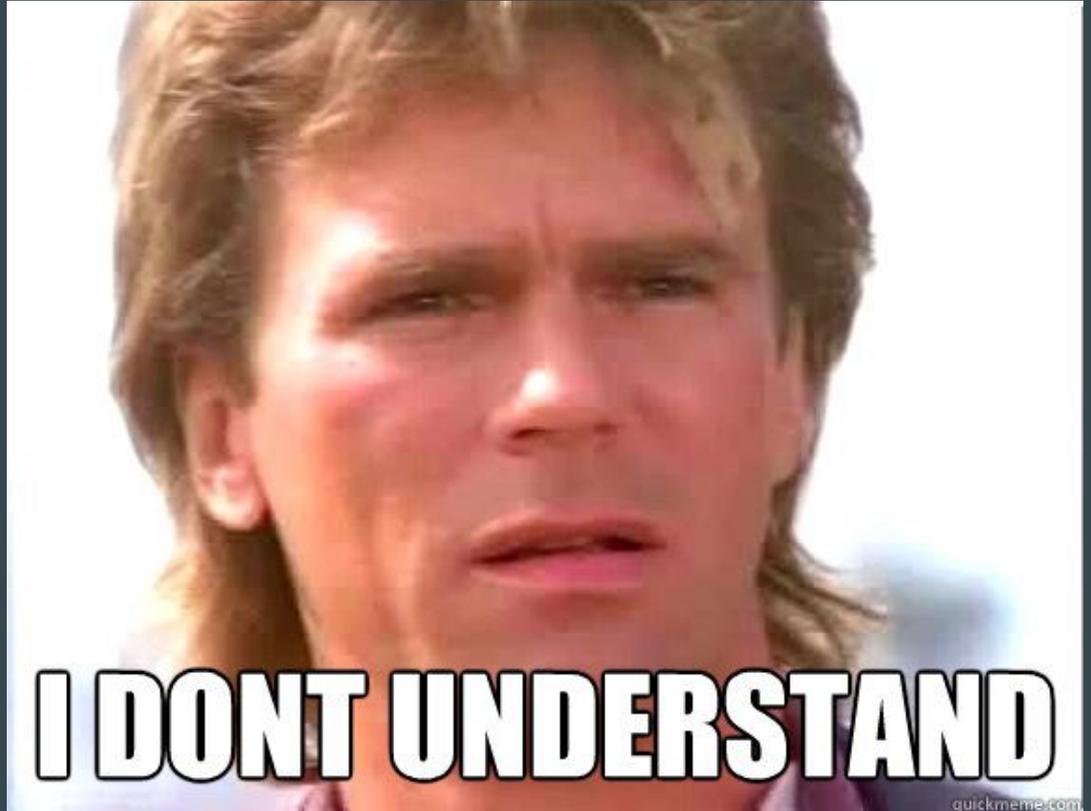
- God is bodiless--an invisible spirit (John 4:24)
- God is eternal (creation is not... people made...)
- God is unchanging (everything else is changing)
- God is omnipotent (everything else limited)
- God is omnipresent (impossible to hide)
- God is omniscient (hears all, sees all, knows all)
- God is all-good (a perfect love without variation)
- God is all-righteous (vse-pravedniy--judging rightly)
- God is all-sufficient (without any "need")
- God is all-blessed (complete joy in divine life)
- Creator, Almighty, Master, King, Provider, & more...

We're going to skip Chapter 4 and come back....

So... on to... Chapter 5:

*Father's comments:
For the life of me I
can't figure out why
the author inserted the
prayer chapter right
here...*

*So let's jump to
Chapter 5, on Sin!*



Chapter 5: Sin

This whole chapter is a gem of simplicity and worth a closer look [*excerpts, p. 20-21.*]

Most contemporary teachings would emphasize the Greek word for sin, *amartia* and show that the word itself points to not merely a legal violation, but missing God's will, which is his goodness and blessedness: to fall into the slavery of my own will...



Chapter 6: The Sign of the Cross

For the author, the Sign of the Cross contains layers of meaning:

- Confession of Christ as Savior
- Points to the Mystical Cross
- Demons actually tremble when sign ourselves carefully
- The very act of signing protects and guards Christian people

[excerpts from pp. 22-23]



Then a collection of chapters on Prayer

Father's comments: it shows you how central prayer is in the Orthodox tradition that, even with all of Part 2 being about prayer, most of Part 1 (the "Basic Concepts") are ALSO about prayer!



Chapter 4: Prayer

What is prayer? [*recount unique answer from Ben Logan in 2007...*]

Fr. Seraphim Slobodskoy:
“Our turning to God is prayer.”

[*excerpts on p. 19*]



Chapter 7: Standing and Bowing During Prayer

This little chapter speaks
for itself!

[read *p. 25*]



Chapter 8: Different Types of Prayer

The author identifies three broad categories of prayer (by intention)

1. Prayers of Praise & Thanksgiving
2. Prayers of Petition
3. Penitential Prayers



Chapter 9: When God Hears our Prayers



Or... perhaps more precisely: “What is necessary for God to Hear our Prayers”

[read excerpt on p. 28]

To serve the Liturg, the priest (and by extension the lay person) must

- “First be at peace with all
- “Have a pure heart
- “Fast from previous evening
- “Remain in a proper spirit” going into the service

Chapter 10: Where and How We Can Pray to God

“We can pray to God everywhere because God is everywhere: at home, at church, on every path. The Christian must pray every day:

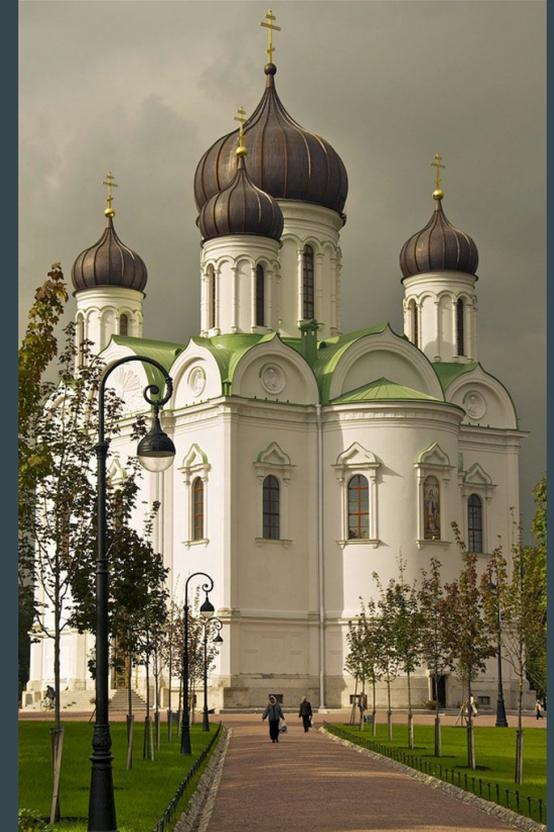
- Morning and evening
- Before and after eating
- Before and after every kind of work

Two broad categories of prayer (2 wings)

- Prayer at home or private prayer
- Public prayer or prayer at church



Chapter 11: The Church Building (Khram or “Temple”)



Chapter 11: The Temple (The Dome)

[*excerpts from
chapter 11, pp.
31-35*]

The Dome:
heaven
descending to
earth, presenting
Christ to us



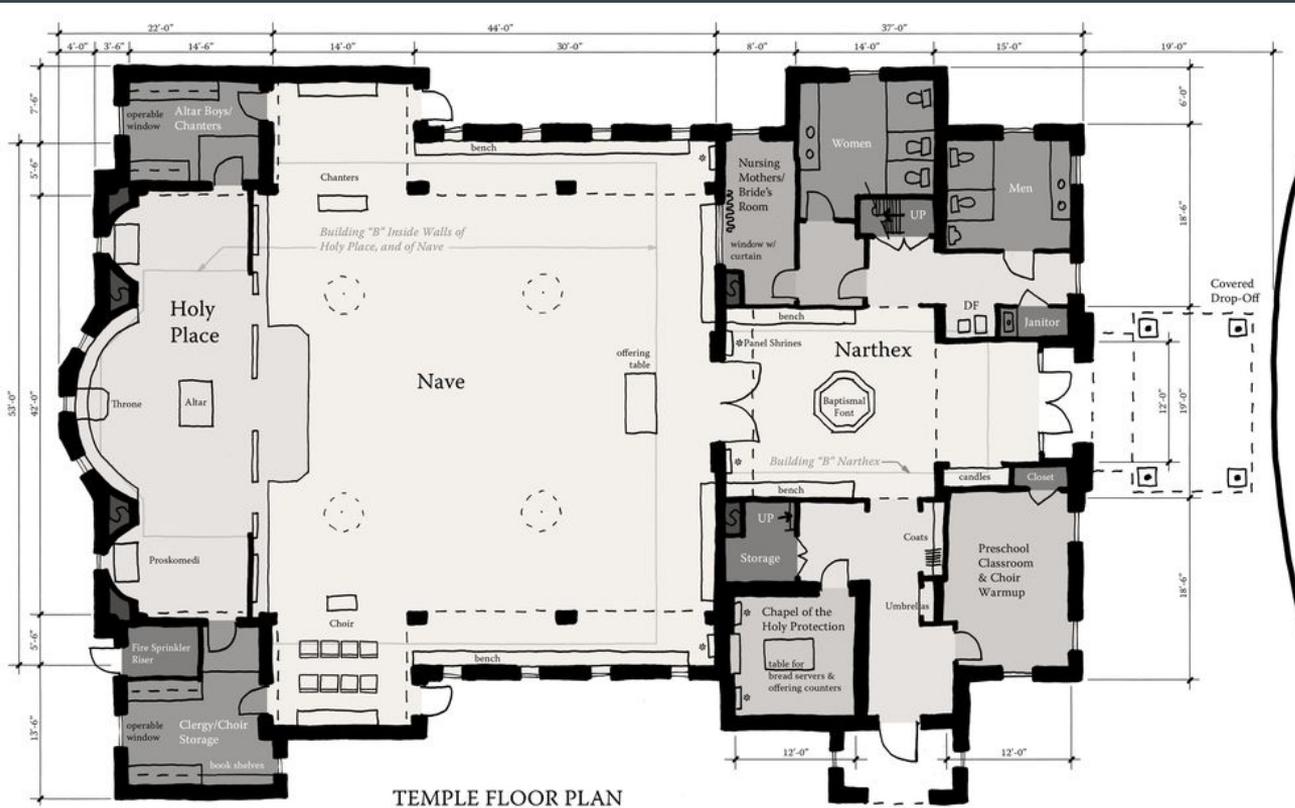
Chapter 11: The Temple (Cross and Belltower)



Chapter 11: The Temple (Porch)



Chapter 11: The Temple (The Narthex, Nave, Altar)



Chapter 11: The Temple (The Eucharist)



Chapter 11: The Temple (Receiving Communion)



Chapter 12: The Priest's Blessing



Next Week: Final Chapter on Icons & Part 2 on “Prayers”

