Chapter 18 – Study Questions

1. Why do the disciples ask the question in verse 1?
   1. Perhaps they are upset or even jealous that St. Peter has twice been singled out for his faith (and twice chastised for a lack of faith). Their human nature is quite apparent. They are at least thinking about their positions in relationship to Jesus vis-à-vis their fellow disciples. Of course, this is not what Jesus wants. He does not want us comparing ourselves to one another; trying to out-do our fellow Christians for some worldly idea of seating-order. Furthermore, they truly don’t understand the meaning of greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They are making an assumption that “the greatest” in heaven will somehow be related to an earthly standard. However, nothing from God is ever put up against a worldly standard by God!
2. What is Jesus’ answer?
   1. Jesus’ answer is nothing they would expect. Jesus does not give an answer to their question directly because He doesn’t like the question. Salvation has nothing to do with the “greatness” of anyone – it has to do with God’s love and mercy! What Jesus wants is for us to be transformed; for us to be converted in our hearts to Him. If we have humble, pure, innocent, joyful, faith (the faith of a child), then we will have the necessary faith.
3. Why is Jesus’ answer in verses 3-5 relevant to His warning in verse 6? For whom is this warning intended?
   1. This warning is for anyone, but in particular for the disciples. As such, it’s a warning for all clerics in the church, to make sure they do not lead humble, innocent, faithful people into wayward paths because of heresies, scandals, or any such thing. Therefore, verses 3-5 are relevant because they set the standards for what is necessary for salvation and the preciousness of anyone bearing those standards of faith (the faith of a child).
4. What is meant in verses 8 and 9? Should this be taken literally?
   1. Certainly, these verses should not be taken literally. They are meant to shake us, to waken us, to jolt us, so that we always have in mind the dangers of sin. Sin can be so dangerous to our salvation, to our health, to our bodies, to our minds, and to our neighbors, that we have to constantly fight against committing sin. These are verses that are meant to keep us vigilant not only in the avoidance of sin, but in the practice of righteousness.
5. In verses 10-14, Jesus continues to speak of the “little ones.” Who are these “little ones?”
   1. These “little ones” are not just children (though they are a part) but they refer to anyone who has the pure, innocent, and humble faith of a child. The “little ones” are the people in the Church.
6. Why is it such an offense to God to make one of the “little ones” fall away from belief?
   1. It is such an offense because the are innocent and minding their own business. When someone causes them to fall away, it means that person has caused an offense or scandal that pushed the “little one” to fall away. Worse, the person causing the offence could have done so with the expressed intent of leading the “little one” away through heresy or deviousness. The Lord already has the “little ones” in His fold, and to break into the flock and purposely pull one (or more) away is a direct attack upon the Lord. All the sheep are His!
7. Is finding the lost sheep the same as proselytizing? What is the difference? (Hint: look at 10:5-15)
   1. Searching for the lost sheep is not the same as proselytizing. Proselytizing is when we go out and specifically preach the Gospel to bring people into the Church – to make them Christians. Searching for the lost sheep means looking for someone who is already a Christian, already a member of the body of Christ, but who may have gotten lost and needs help returning back to the fold. In the case of proselytization, we certainly can’t force anyone to join the Church, nor should we spend an inordinate amount of time trying to do so for any individual. Likewise, if a “lost sheep” is someone who purposely leaves the fold and does not want to return, we do not have to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to get that one back. Searching for the lost sheep really means looking for those who have strayed but want to be in full communion with the Church in their hearts.
8. What are verses 15-20 truly about? What does it mean in terms of the nature of the Church?
   1. Verses 15-20 are really about discipline and order in the Church. It means the Church has a serious role to play in the reconciliation of people to one another. As well, it means there are ways within the Church to help come to agreements and settle issues. Further, these verses, along with verse 16:19, give great responsibility and authority to the Church. Jesus grants the Church a large breadth of purview over matters of faith and order. For those who do not adhere to the precepts and discipline/order of the Church, they put their own selves outside of the Church. The Church does not put people out, people move out of the Church (the Church simply recognizes those people moving out of communion). That’s also why the answer to 6a above is so important to those called by God and given the privilege to serve as clergy in the Church.
9. When should we stop offering forgiveness?
   1. Never.