

Ignorant of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3-6)

Sometimes it seems like the believers are the ones for whom the gospel is veiled.

by [Daniel Schultz](#)

February 9, 2024

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

Paul tells us that if the “gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” John Calvin and other Reformers took eagerly to this idea, encouraging and even demanding a laity well-informed about the content and meaning of scripture. The people in the pews were no less enthusiastic, often expecting preachers to deliver hours-long sermons as a form of popular entertainment.

These days the situation is nearly the opposite. Atheists, theoretically the members of society least likely to be included in the covenant of salvation, routinely demonstrate better knowledge of the Bible than Christians. (You might think Satanists are the least obvious choice for salvation. But no, by their own description, they’re just atheists with a bit of an edge.) Laypeople, again theoretically Paul’s faithful ones of the covenant, are all too often willing to delegate the understanding of scripture to ordained leaders.

Between the scriptural ignorance and the willingness of some Christians to subordinate their faith to their political affiliation, it certainly seems sometimes like the god of this world has blinded the believers, not the un-

I don't mean to suggest that God is intentionally keeping us from seeing "the light of the glory of Christ" so we will not be saved. In fact, it's just the opposite. It might be that God grants us the grace of ignorance, for our own good.

Keeping the gospel hidden, and Christians guessing at its exact parameters, ought to serve as a reminder that it is not ourselves that we proclaim, but Jesus—and ourselves as slaves for his sake.

Humility, alas, is not always the strong point of people of the covenant. Having access to the absolute truth of the gospel has a distressing tendency to lead Christians to beat one another over the head with it.

History shows various branches of the faith doing just that, over and over, sometimes with horrific results. Somewhere between 4.5 million and 8 million people died in the Thirty Years' War, depopulating parts of Germany by up to half. Our salvation in heaven might depend on us letting the light of Christ shine in our hearts. Our salvation on earth might depend on us admitting that we're not too sure about what that means, exactly.