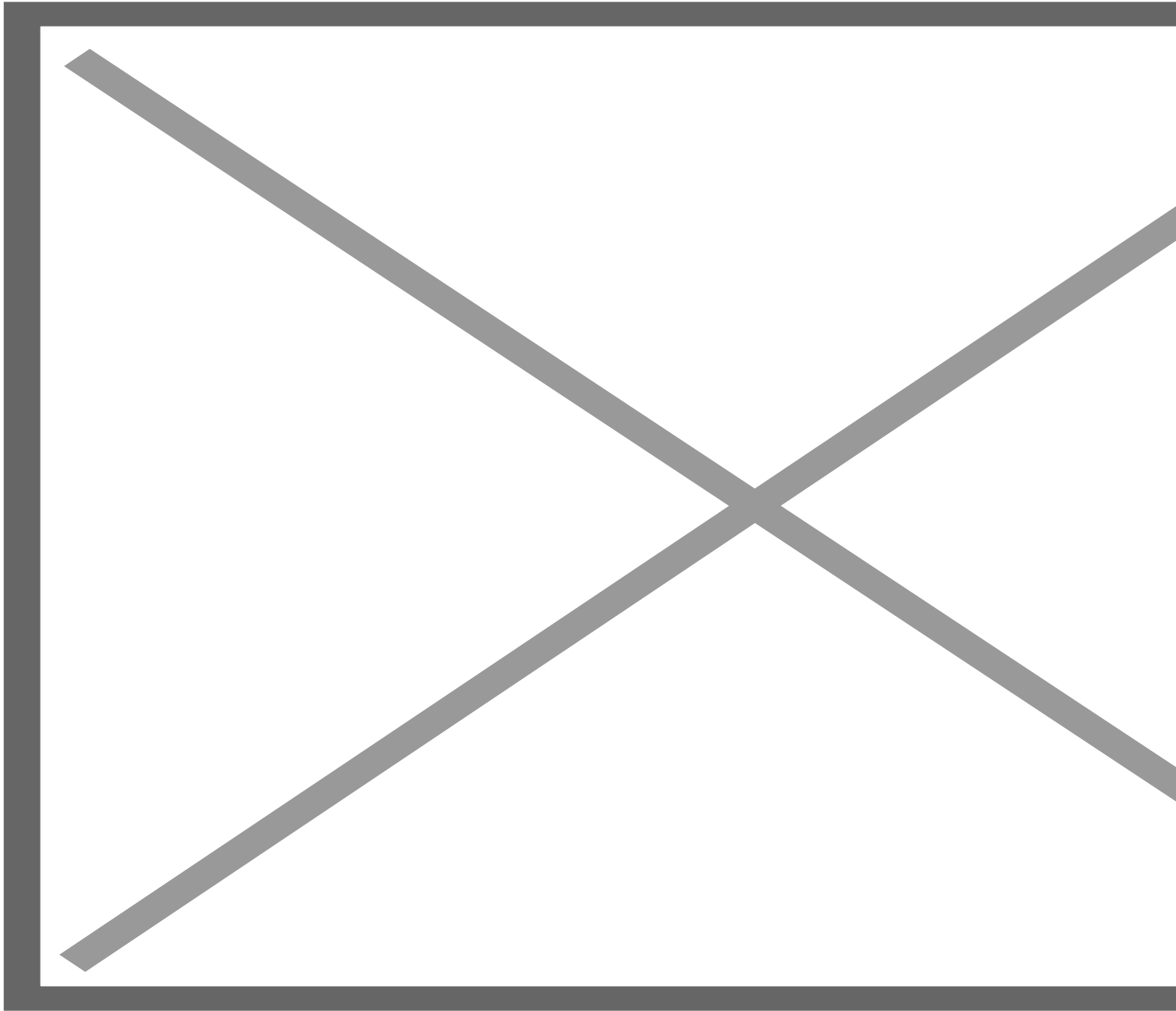


The smoke screen of “speaking the truth in love”

It seems like every Christian on social media has an opinion on Philip Yancey’s confession. I think we should keep them to ourselves.

by [Brandon Ambrosino](#)

January 20, 2026



Century illustration (Source images: Creative Commons & Getty)

In early January, Phillip Yancey, a prominent Christian author and pastor, shared an announcement that shook many Christians. “To my great shame, I confess that for eight years I willfully engaged in a sinful affair with a married woman,” he wrote in an email to the flagship Evangelical publication *Christianity Today*. “Having disqualified myself from Christian ministry, I am therefore retiring from writing, speaking, and social media.”

Yancey’s statement was accompanied by a statement from his wife of 55 years, Janet, who promised not to break her “sacred vow” of marriage to Phillip: “God grant me the grace to forgive also, despite my unfathomable trauma.”

Although Yancey has long been a popular figure among Christians, his candid confession made him mainstream news. *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *People* all covered Yancey’s affair.

And, of course, social media is buzzing with opinions. Some are pointing out that Yancey, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease in 2022, confessed his sin because he needs his wife to continue taking care of him. “Is this repentance? Or is this strategy?” wrote one pastor in a long post that garnered thousands of likes and reshares. Another pastor opined about Yancey’s “deception,” acknowledging that it called to mind his own marital infidelity. “A PR-produced apology,” wrote one Christian author, “is not enough.”

Well, what is enough? And who decides that? Other Christians? Other authors? Other married folks?

I understand that each marriage, including my own, contributes goods to our communities. Marital love flows outwardly and offers unique contributions to the common good. Loving, strong, stable marriages are one form of relationship that helps society to flourish.

Be that as it may, I do not believe I have the right to have, much less share, an opinion on the Yanceys. Only the Yanceys have that right—and they’ve done so. In fact, Yancey has gone much further than other figures in similar situations, taking the unprecedented step of disqualifying himself from all future ministry. That should tell us he holds very strong opinions about what he’s done. Why, then, should I add any other opinion to the situation?

I suppose this essay might make it seem like I’m eager to offer another opinion on the Yanceys, but the opinion I want to offer is different from any I’ve seen: It is the opinion that Christians should stop having such strong opinions. At the bare minimum, we should keep them to ourselves.

Christians have strong opinions about everything. In the last few decades, we’ve been brainwashed into believing the only way to be a true Christian is to broadcast those opinions loudly and proudly, without apology, finesse, or sensitivity.

A few months ago, I was lucky to have a book published called *Is It God’s Will?* A childhood church friend took to social media to share a picture of herself holding my book and congratulating me. One of our former youth leaders jumped on the post to share an opinion: “I know one thing for sure. It’s not God’s will for Brandon to marry a man!” When my friend tried to respectfully just move past the Gotcha! comment, the woman responded, “Just speaking the TRUTH in LOVE!”

That’s when the narrator of the movie would say in a voice-over, *Oh, but there was no love to be heard*. Or felt. Surely the person ostensibly being “loved” in a given situation is the one who is in the position to assess whether they are truly being loved. I’m not sure it’s possible to insist you love someone who insists they feel unloved by you.

Growing up during the culture wars of the 90s, and later being trained as a “Champion for Christ” at Liberty University in the early aughts, I’m quite familiar with the phrase “speaking the truth in love.” It means “saying out loud something that would hurt most reasonable people and not having to feel bad about intentionally hurting someone.” And the hurt seems to be the point of the whole thing. “Speaking the truth in love” has become an excuse for not having to take responsibility for knowingly being mean to someone.

The other problem with “speaking the truth in love” is how “the truth” is understood. The truth that Christians believe in is not primarily a political or cultural opinion, but a *person*. “I am the truth,” says Jesus in John 14. The truth is “in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21). The truth that constitutes Jesus’ being is the truth of God’s salvation, the truth of God’s loving nearness. Jesus no doubt speaks truly, “bears witness to the truth” (John 18:37). But Christians believe he is the truth because of the way he presents himself in the world. Jesus embodies the truth about God in his very flesh, even when he is silent. Jesus is the Word of God, what God has to say to us, even when he is wordless. If Jesus was interested in defending truth with his words, he would’ve done so when Pilate challenged him to a philosophical debate about the nature of truth. Instead, he kept quiet and demonstrated by his steadfast commitment to God’s nonviolent cause in the world what it looks like—*not what it sounds like*—to belong to an alternative kingdom.

Christians ought to follow the lead of Jesus and flip this tired slogan on its head. Rather than speaking the truth lovingly, we should speak love truthfully. The focus should change from telling the truth to loving people. And the way that we love people is not by shouting things at them or writing words about them. We love them by loving them. No need to join the linguistic games that some of our Christian friends play with the concept of love. We all know what it is to feel loved: welcomed, valued, treasured, embraced. That is how God wants people to feel when they are around us. And it is they, not we, who get to decide whether or not they have been loved by us. In most cases, what this love looks like is simply shutting our mouths, refusing to unleash yet another opinion into the situation, and simply offering ourselves to those who are hurting.

One of my favorite books of Yancey’s is called *The Jesus I Never Knew*. The Jesus American Christians know too well is the talkative Jesus, the storyteller, the man with a saying for every occasion, the op-ed writer. But the Jesus we need to get to know is the quiet Jesus, the one who speaks truth wordlessly, who embodies the truth of God’s saving love, who tells the truth about God without needing to open his mouth. This is the Jesus who calls us to follow him as he quietly brings healing, comfort, and love to a too-noisy world.