

The Ideal Image ... Without Filters

Once upon a time, we'd take a family photo and be done with it. We'd send it off to be developed, and when it came back, we just lived with the results—even if your little sister had a finger up her nose. At that point, what could you do?

Not today. Photos are instantaneous and easily evaluated. Is it good or not? Instagram and TikTok offer an array of filters and effects to put yourself in the best light possible. Why would you want all your Instagram followers to know you deal with acne or dry skin? Filter it out!

I shake my head at the vanity of people who do this, but then I remember the annual family Christmas photo we took last month. Correction: we didn't take *a* photo; we took LOTS of photos. We wanted just the right image with no blinks, no turned heads, no fingers up noses. In years past, we have photoshopped a head from one photo and pasted it over another. We want to capture the perfect image of the perfect family.

This is nothing new.

In a fascinating article from the BBC, Kelly Grovier reports on discoveries made about many older paintings. Restorers are discovering portraits that have been retouched, sometimes decades or centuries later, to bring the portrait more in line with what had become more fashionable.



Portrait of Isabella de' Medici (1574), attributed to Alessandro Allori, before and after it was retouched (Credit: Carnegie Museum of Art)

Take, for example, the portrait of Isabella de' Medici painted in 1574. Three hundred years later, someone decided her looks weren't up to contemporary standards, so an unknown painter gave her a "saccharine smirk, flawless complexion, sculpted nose and perfectly tapered chin." I suppose if this was done today, Isabella would be given a pouting duck face or a scrunch face.

A desire resides within us to make ourselves look better. *If I look better, maybe I am better. Maybe people will like me or think differently of me.* However, remove the filters and we're still the same people. We can make all sorts of surface changes, but they're not real. You are still you.

We try to do the same thing with our whole selves. We can try to transform ourselves, but we're still the same sinners underneath the layers of our own self-effort and self-righteousness. We can filter over the blemishes on our skin, but no filter can remove the blemish of our sin. Only Christ can do that.

And that is exactly what He did. He sees us as His beautiful creation. We have grossly marred the image of God in us with our sin, but Christ died a horrible, ugly death to remove that sin and restore the beauty of His creation.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17).

You don't need any filters. Let the light and joy of Christ shine through you. The world thinks they know what beauty is, but we're attracted to a face full of joy.

"A joyful heart makes a face cheerful" (Prov. 15:13).

Don't mask your sin. Surrender it to Christ and let the beauty of His presence be seen in you.