

James 1:9-11

The identity of the rich man: believer or unbeliever?

9 But let the brother of humble circumstances glory in his high position; 10 and *let* the rich man *glory* in his humiliation,

On the surface, it might seem that only the poor man is a believer. However, if we lay out the passage, something very interesting appears.

⁹Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ ἀδελφὸς
ὁ ταπεινὸς ἐν τῷ ὕψει αὐτοῦ,
¹⁰ ὁ δὲ πλούσιος ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει αὐτοῦ

The balanced structure strongly implies that the two articular adjectives (ὁ ταπεινὸς...and ὁ πλούσιος) are governed by the same noun “brother” (ὁ ἀδελφὸς). In other words, James is addressing both the rich brother and the poor one.

The fact that the rich man is said to ultimately fade away (1:10b,11) is a further description of the image of a fading flower. It is not a theological comment on whether or not he is a believer.