

The Pistis Proof Burden

Hebrews 11:1, Greek Semantic Range, and the Illicit Upgrade
from Assurance to Evidence

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Revised August 2026

Central claim

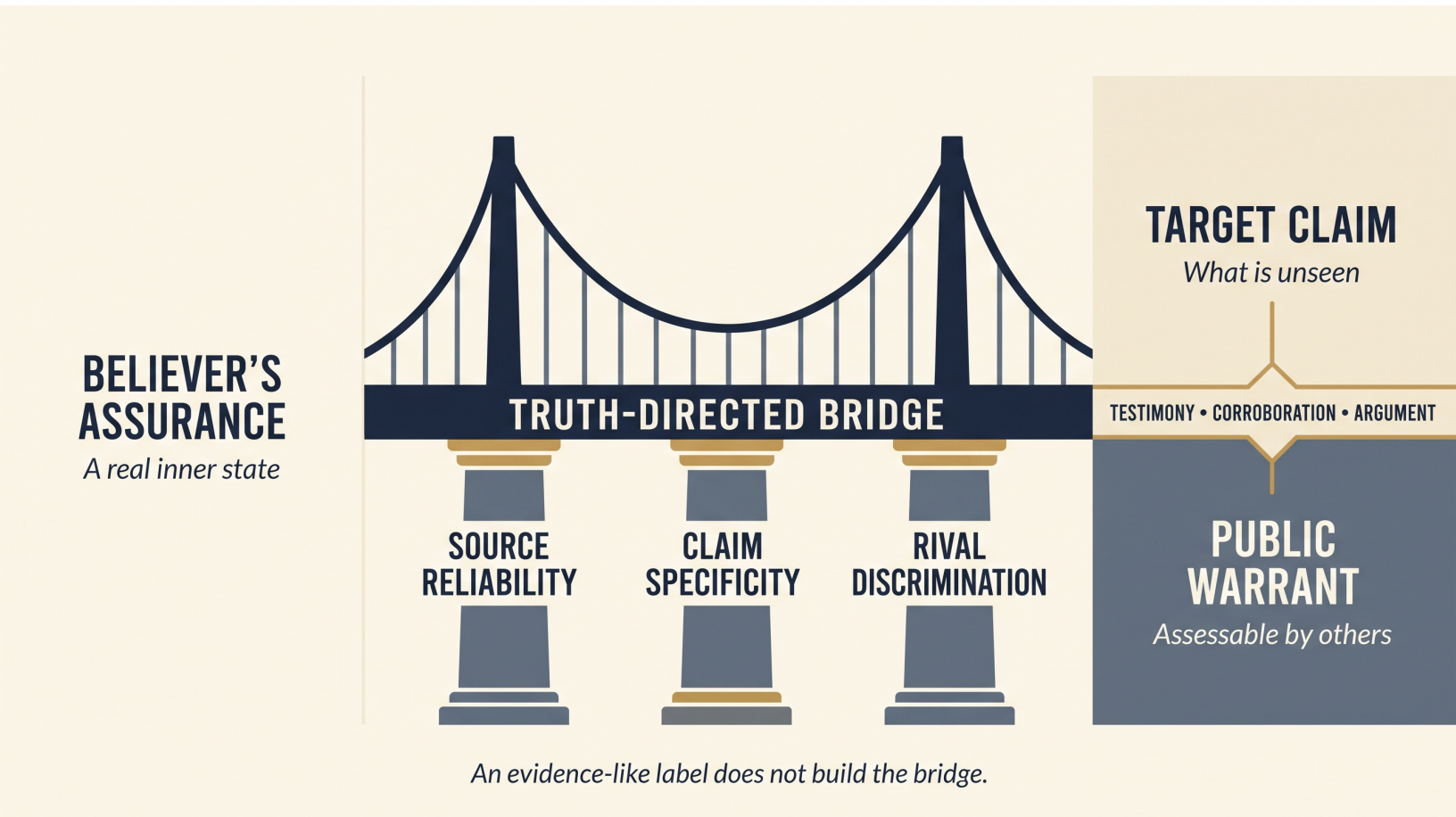
Even if Hebrews 11:1 properly calls faith assurance, conviction, evidence, or a present grasp of unseen reality, that description does not by itself establish faith's object. Assurance supports a target claim only through a defended bridge connecting its source to that specific claim and distinguishing it from relevant rivals. The verse may name a warranted posture once such grounds exist; it cannot create those grounds by assigning faith an evidence-like label.

Preview:

Granted reading	What it directly gives	Missing bridge	Bounded verdict
Faith is assurance, conviction, evidence, or present reality regarding what is unseen.	A role for faith and a believer's posture within the exhortation of Hebrews.	Why that posture tracks this claim better than live rivals, through a reliable and claim-specific source.	Hebrews can guide endurance after grounds are supplied; the label alone does not supply public proof.

The argument does not choose one exhaustive translation, deny personal reasons, or rule on the truth of Christianity. It isolates the additional proof burden that remains even after a favored reading is granted.

Visual preview:



Read from left to right. The inner state on the left is real, but it supports the unseen target only if the dark bridge is held by three piers: the producing source is reliable, its output reaches the exact claim, and the resulting datum favors that claim over live rivals. The gold continuation marks a separate public-transfer question: testimony, corroboration, or argument must make the truth link assessable beyond the original believer. A missing pier does not show the target false; it marks where the stated evidence route remains incomplete. The diagram permits both transitions; it denies that the word evidence performs either one. A completed bridge supports only the target and audience it actually reaches, not every related doctrine.

Abstract

Hebrews 11:1 is sometimes treated as though calling faith “assurance,” “conviction,” “evidence,” “proof,” or a present “reality” settles both the character of Christian faith and the truth of its unseen object. This paper grants the principal lexical and exegetical options and asks what follows epistemically. The answer depends on keeping three evidential statuses separate. A believer’s assurance is direct evidence that the believer is assured. It may also contribute to personal warrant for the assured proposition if the state is produced by a truth-connected, claim-specific, and defeater-sensitive source. It becomes public evidence only insofar as testimony, corroboration, or argument makes that truth connection assessable by others. None of these transfers occurs merely because a translation applies an evidence-like noun to faith.

The paper reconstructs the missing bridge through four questions: What is the datum? Which proposition is it meant to support? Why is the datum more expected if that proposition is true than if a relevant rival is true? What conditions identify error and permit correction? A simple likelihood comparison makes the third question explicit without reducing all evidence to numbers. If incompatible religious outlooks can produce comparably strong assurance, generic assurance has little power to discriminate among them unless further information identifies its source. This conclusion does not refute religious experience, externalist warrant, or Christianity. Alston’s doxastic-practice approach and Plantinga’s extended Aquinas/Calvin model are serious proposals that a Christian experience can be truth-connected without an antecedent public proof. Yet such a proposal relocates the burden to the reliability and identity of the claimed source; it does not make the verse itself a public demonstration.

Applied to psychological, ontological, and legal or title-deed readings of Hebrews 11:1, the same result holds. Each reading may illuminate faith’s role in an exhortation to perseverance. None removes the distinction between describing a community’s confidence and establishing the promised reality. The constructive result is a five-question proof-burden audit and an annotated formal appendix. Hebrews may responsibly name the posture of endurance toward an unseen fulfillment when independent grounds support trust in the promisor. The warrant comes through those grounds; it is not generated by the label assigned to faith.

Keywords: Hebrews 11:1; *pistis*; assurance; evidence; proof burden; likelihood; religious experience; public warrant

1 The Burden Hidden in a Single Word

Hebrews 11:1 joins faith with things hoped for and things not seen. Its English renderings invite a powerful inference. If faith is the “substance” or “reality” of what is hoped for, then perhaps faith makes the hoped-for object present. If faith is “conviction,” then perhaps the strength of conviction certifies the object. If faith is “evidence” or “proof,” then perhaps faith answers the demand for grounds. In each case, a descriptive term can appear to cross the distance between a believer’s posture and an external conclusion.

That distance is the subject of this paper. The question is not whether faith can ever be rational, evidentially grounded, or truth-connected. Nor is it whether the Greek terms of Hebrews 11:1 have objective, subjective, relational, or demonstrative associations. The narrower question is what must be added before a state of assurance counts as evidence for the object of assurance.

Consider a familiar nonreligious example. A patient feels completely assured that a treatment will succeed. The assurance is a real psychological fact. It may arise from an expert consultation, a laboratory result, wishful thinking, or a misunderstanding. Knowing that the patient is assured tells us something about the patient. Whether it tells us much about the treatment depends on how that assurance was produced. If the assurance follows a reliable diagnosis and evidence-based prognosis, it may inherit support through those grounds. If the same assurance would have arisen from reassuring

language regardless of the clinical facts, it adds little support for success. Confidence is therefore neither worthless nor self-authenticating. Its force depends on a bridge.

The same structure applies to trust. Trust can be intellectually responsible, morally valuable, and practically necessary. It can also be misplaced. What separates warranted from unwarranted trust is not the mere presence or intensity of the posture but its relation to a trustworthy object and adequate grounds. Recent historical and theological work on *pistis* emphasizes trust, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and relational dependence rather than reducing the term to assent to propositions (Morgan 2015; Morgan 2022). That richer account strengthens the need for a bridge. Relational trust is answerable to the identity and trustworthiness of the one trusted.

The proof-burden principle

Calling faith assurance, conviction, evidence, proof, substance, or present reality describes a role assigned to faith. To establish the unseen object, an argument must still identify a truth-connected source, show why it bears on the specific claim, compare relevant alternatives, and state what could defeat or correct the judgment. An evidence-like label cannot substitute for that work.

This principle is neutral between believers and skeptics. It prevents a skeptic from dismissing all personal religious reasons merely because they are not fully public. It also prevents an apologist from presenting the believer's assured state as though the state were already a public demonstration. The levels must first be distinguished; their possible connections can then be assessed fairly.

2 Granting the Lexical and Exegetical Range

The Greek sentence is compact: *Estin de pistis elpizomenōn hypostasis, pragmatōn elenchos ou blepomenōn*. Its three contested terms are *pistis*, *hypostasis*, and *elenchos*. Lexicons and translations distribute them across overlapping fields: faith, trust, faithfulness, assurance, confidence, substance, reality, conviction, evidence, and proof (Bauer et al. 2000). A single English line cannot reproduce every association while keeping every distinction visible.

This paper does not repeat the entire lexical debate. It grants three broad families of reading because the proof-burden question survives each one.

2.1 The psychological or dispositional reading

On a psychological reading, Hebrews 11:1 characterizes faith as assurance or confidence about what is hoped for and conviction regarding what is unseen. This fits naturally with the surrounding call not to abandon confidence and with the catalogue of agents who endure and act before receiving what is promised. Commentators disagree over the balance of inward and objective force, but the rhetorical setting in Hebrews 10:35–12:2 plainly concerns perseverance under pressure (Attridge 1989; deSilva 2000; Koester 2001; Cockerill 2012).

If this reading is correct, the verse tells us what faithful hope is like or how it functions. It does not follow that the intensity of the state verifies the hoped-for object. A person may be accurately described as assured even when mistaken. The reading therefore supplies a datum about the subject and community while leaving the truth connection open.

2.2 The ontological or present-reality reading

On an objective reading, *hypostasis* can be understood as substance, foundation, or the present reality of what is hoped for. Faith, on this approach, is not merely a feeling; it participates in or gives

present purchase on a future reality. This interpretation may be theologically rich. Yet its objective grammar does not eliminate the epistemic question. The statement that faith gives present reality to unseen things is itself a claim made by Hebrews. A reader still needs grounds for accepting the text’s characterization as truth-tracking rather than as a community’s theological self-description.

An analogy helps. A constitution may declare that an office embodies the authority of the people. The declaration defines a legal relation inside an accepted order. To establish that the constitution is valid, that the officeholder is legitimate, or that the people consented requires further historical and institutional facts. In the same way, assigning faith an objective role inside a theological account does not, merely through the assignment, authenticate the account.

2.3 The legal, evidential, or title-deed reading

Some readings stress the forensic or demonstrative associations of *elenchos*; popular explanations may combine these with *hypostasis* as a title deed or guarantee. The title-deed analogy can be illuminating if handled carefully. A valid deed is evidence of ownership because the issuer, asset, chain of transfer, signatures, and legal system have been independently authenticated. Ink on paper is not self-validating, and private certainty that a document is genuine does not create title.

The analogy therefore supports, rather than removes, the bridge requirement. If faith functions like a deed, one must identify what makes it valid: who issued it, how the issuer’s identity is established, which promise it covers, and which procedures distinguish a valid grant from a convincing imitation. “Faith is the deed” names a proposed relation. It does not supply the authentication record.

These readings can remain in serious exegetical competition. The present argument requires no winner. Whether the verse emphasizes an inward posture, an objective participation, or an evidential function, the next question remains: why should this state or relation track the specific unseen claim?

3 Three Evidential Statuses

The word *evidence* is used for several related ideas. Achinstein distinguishes multiple concepts of evidence rather than treating the word as having one simple philosophical meaning (Achinstein 2001). For the present problem, three practical statuses are enough. They are not three rival definitions; they are three levels at which a believer’s assurance can be considered.

Table 1: Three statuses of a believer’s assurance.

Status	Direct datum	Additional bridge	Legitimate conclusion
State evidence	A subject reports or displays assurance that claim <i>H</i> is true.	Ordinary checks that the report accurately describes the subject’s state.	The subject is assured of <i>H</i> ; this says little by itself about whether <i>H</i> is true.
Personal object-directed warrant	The subject’s assurance arises through an experience, testimony, memory, or inference.	A truth-connected source bearing on <i>H</i> , with relevant defeaters absent or answered.	The subject may be warranted in believing <i>H</i> , even if others cannot fully share the source.
Public evidence	Testimony, records, arguments, or observations are available for common assessment.	Source identification, reliability, claim specificity, comparison with rivals, and correction conditions.	Others have a reason to prefer <i>H</i> over relevant alternatives to the degree supported.

3.1 Assurance as evidence of assurance

The first status is modest but genuine. A person's confident behavior, testimony, physiological responses, and stable commitments can be evidence that the person is assured. This matters historically and pastorally. The persistence of the community addressed by Hebrews may show what its members believed, valued, and were prepared to endure. Such evidence can also affect how we explain the rise and durability of a movement.

But the object changes when one asks whether the promised reality exists. Evidence that someone believes *H* is not automatically evidence that *H* is true. Sometimes belief reports do bear on their objects: a reliable witness's confidence about an observed event can be significant. The reason is not confidence alone. It is confidence joined to opportunity, competence, honesty, memory, and other facts that connect the witness to the event.

3.2 Personal warrant for the object

A subject may possess reasons that are difficult to transfer. An experience can be vivid, coherent, repeated, transformative, and integrated into a broader life. William Alston argues that putative perception of a deity can participate in a socially established doxastic practice—a practice for forming beliefs—and need not be rejected merely because it cannot first be justified by a noncircular proof acceptable to every rival practice (Alston 1991). Alvin Plantinga's externalist model goes further: if Christian belief is true and is produced by properly functioning, truth-aimed faculties in the relevant way, it can possess warrant without being inferred from publicly shared premises (Plantinga 2000).

These are serious proposals. They show why “not publicly demonstrated” should not be equated with “irrational for the subject.” Yet both proposals require an actual truth connection. On Alston's account, the reliability and social establishment of the practice matter, and overrides—considerations that defeat or undercut a belief—must be addressed. On Plantinga's account, the truth of the Christian story and the proper function of a specifically Christian belief-forming process do indispensable work. Neither model treats sheer assurance, detached from its production, as sufficient.

3.3 Public evidence for the object

Public evidence need not be available to every person without training or context. A medical scan is public in the relevant sense even though expert interpretation is required: the record can be shared, procedures can be audited, and disagreements can be investigated. Public evidence is therefore not “evidence requiring no background.” It is information whose bearing on a claim can be assessed beyond the original subject through identifiable methods and correction conditions.

A private experience can enter public discussion through testimony. Once it does, its force depends on questions familiar from other testimony: Was the report accurately formed and preserved? What did the experience represent? Are there independent checks? How often do similar experiences occur under incompatible interpretations? Which explanation predicts the report more successfully? Testimony can be strong evidence. The transition simply requires more than restating the witness's confidence.

The status rule

An assured state can be real, personally warranted, and publicly relevant at the same time. Those statuses are connected but not identical. Every upward transfer requires information about how the state was produced, what claim it targets, and why it favors that claim over alternatives.

4 The Missing Bridge

Four elements make the bridge assessable. None is a demand for impossible certainty. Together they prevent a label from doing the work of an argument.

4.1 Source reliability

First, what produced the assurance? Possibilities include perception, memory, testimony, a text, communal formation, inference, an apparent revelation, or some combination. The source need not be infallible. It must be sufficiently connected to truth in the domain at issue. A thermometer can be reliable within a range without being perfect; its readings matter because calibration and failure modes are known.

For religious assurance, identifying the source is especially important. “My experience produced assurance” leaves open whether the source was the deity specified by Hebrews, ordinary cognition under religious framing, a different spiritual source, community reinforcement, or a mixture. Saying that the experience came from the specified deity would solve the source problem only if that identification were supported rather than assumed.

4.2 Claim specificity

Second, how much content does the source support? A general sense of transcendence does not automatically support the resurrection of a particular person, the reliability of a canon, or a detailed promise about an afterlife. Strong emotion can accompany a specific interpretation without providing the content that makes the interpretation specific.

Claim specificity is not hostility to religious inference. Testimony and background beliefs can legitimately add content. The requirement is to mark where it enters. If a believer’s experience supports only “a powerful benevolent presence seems near,” while scripture and community supply the identity and promises, then the full claim rests on a combined route. Each part can be assessed in its proper place.

4.3 Rival discrimination

Third, does the datum favor the target over a relevant rival? Evidence is contrastive: it supports one possibility by being more expected under that possibility than under another. Sober develops likelihood comparison as a way to make this structure explicit in scientific reasoning (Sober 2008). The underlying question is usable outside statistics: if both the target and its rival make the observation about equally unsurprising, the observation does little to choose between them.

Let the datum be a believer’s strong assurance. Under a Christian truth hypothesis, such assurance may be expected: a trustworthy deity could produce or sustain it. But assurance may also be expected under a rival in which humans in close communities develop durable confidence through testimony, ritual, identity, and selective interpretation. Without more detail, the fact of assurance may fit both. Information about the experience’s content, timing, independence, accuracy, and resistance to ordinary explanations can change the comparison. The model does not prejudge the result; it shows what the result must answer.

4.4 Defeaters and correction

Fourth, what could count against the judgment? A *defeater* is information that either supports the opposite conclusion or weakens the connection between a reason and that conclusion. Discovering that a witness was elsewhere rebuts the witness’s claim. Discovering that a drug reliably induces the same apparent memory undercuts the memory’s force even before showing exactly what happened.

A belief that permits no correction can still be true, but its public evidential standing is difficult to measure. If successful outcomes confirm the belief, failed outcomes are reinterpreted as hidden success, contrary experiences confirm spiritual opposition, and silence confirms a test of faith, then every possible observation points in one direction. The problem is not that the belief mentions unseen realities. The problem is that the proposed bridge has no stated failure condition.

These four elements need not be assembled into one deductive proof. Historical, testimonial, experiential, and explanatory cases often accumulate. The burden is proportional: stronger and more public conclusions require clearer information about the route.

5 Why Comparative Support Matters

A simple formula can expose the key relation without pretending that personal experience comes with precise numerical probabilities. Suppose D is a datum, H is the target claim, R is a relevant rival, and B is shared background information. The likelihood ratio compares how expected the datum is under the two possibilities:

$$\text{LR}(D; H, R \mid B) = \frac{P(D \mid H, B)}{P(D \mid R, B)}.$$

If the ratio is greater than one, D favors H over R in that comparison. If it is near one, D fits both about equally well. If it is less than one, it favors R . This is a measure of comparative support, not the final probability that H is true. Prior information, alternative rivals, data quality, and dependence among observations still matter.

The formula disciplines two common errors. First, a datum can be expected if H is true without strongly supporting H . Rain is expected under the hypothesis of a large storm, but it is also expected under many ordinary weather patterns. Second, the improbability of a datum “by chance” does not establish the preferred explanation unless the preferred explanation predicts the datum better than relevant alternatives.

Applied to assurance, the question is not merely whether a trustworthy deity could cause confidence. It is whether the particular pattern of confidence is more expected if the deity specified by Hebrews is truthfully revealing the relevant claim than if the confidence arose through an alternative route. Generic intensity may not discriminate. Features such as specific novel information, independent convergence, reliable prediction, or correction of the subject’s prior expectations might increase discrimination if securely established.

The framework also clarifies cumulative arguments. Several independent data points can jointly provide more support than any one alone. But repeated reports generated through the same social channel are not fully independent. Ten people repeating one source do not automatically supply ten separate confirmations. The relevant unit is not the number of confident voices but the structure that produced and connected them.

No commitment to Bayesian philosophy is required for the paper’s central result. One may adopt Achinstein’s different account of evidence or a nonprobabilistic theory and still ask whether the datum has an objective truth connection, whether it bears on the specified hypothesis, and whether alternatives explain it. The likelihood ratio serves as a clear model of discrimination, not as a universal definition of evidence.

6 Applying the Burden to the Major Readings

Table 2 shows how the bridge question survives the broad families of interpretation granted earlier.

Table 2: What each reading can establish without an added bridge.

Reading	Datum offered	Hidden premise if treated as proof	Bounded result
Assurance or conviction	The believer has a stable confident posture toward an unseen promise.	Strong assurance is reliably produced when this specific promise is true and not comparably produced under rivals.	Establishes the posture; supports the object only through the defended production route.
Substance or present reality	Faith presently participates in or gives purchase on what is hoped for.	Hebrews' theological assignment of this role is independently reliable and applies to the target promise.	States a theological relation within the discourse; does not authenticate that relation by restatement.
Evidence or proof	Faith functions as conviction, disclosure, or evidence regarding the unseen.	The sense of evidence at issue includes public truth-directed grounds, and those grounds discriminate the claim from alternatives.	May describe faith's role; a modern public proof still requires its premises and bridge.
Title deed or guarantee	Faith is analogous to a present guarantee of future possession.	The issuer, identity, promise, and chain of authorization have been authenticated.	A valid guarantee can be evidence; calling faith a guarantee does not establish validity.

The table prevents two overreactions. One would deny all objective force because an objective reading has been misused. The other would infer public demonstration because objective force is present. A term can designate a real relation without proving to a new audience that the relation obtains. "This signature binds the company" is an objective legal claim. Its truth depends on authority and circumstances that the sentence alone does not establish.

The same point applies to the rhetorical function of Hebrews. The homily addresses an audience already situated within a network of testimony, worship, memory, communal identity, and theological claims. An exhortation can reasonably remind such an audience of a settled framework rather than rehearse its entire basis. Reading the verse as exhortation therefore does not accuse the author of a failed proof. It limits what later readers may claim the verse accomplishes when detached from that framework.

This distinction also opens a responsible theological use. Suppose independent historical, experiential, or philosophical reasons establish that the deity specified by Hebrews is trustworthy and has made the relevant promise. Faith can then be understood as the rational posture of living toward fulfillment not yet seen. The object is warranted through the reasons and trustworthy promisor; Hebrews describes the posture appropriate to that warrant. This is faith *after* grounds, not faith replacing grounds.

7 Incompatible Assurance and the Identity Problem

Religious diversity matters because strong assurance occurs in traditions with incompatible accounts of ultimate reality, revelation, salvation, and authority. McKim treats such diversity as a source of ambiguity and epistemic pressure rather than a simple one-step refutation of religion (McKim 2001). That restraint is correct. Disagreement does not entail that every participant is unjustified or that no one has access to truth.

The relevant problem is discrimination. If adherents of incompatible traditions report peace, moral transformation, sensed presence, answered prayer, fulfilled expectation, and confidence produced by sacred texts, then generic assurance is not unique to one account. A Christian experience may still

have a uniquely truth-connected source. The burden is to identify features that favor that explanation rather than merely repeating features common to the rival reports.

Three distinctions matter.

First, *sincerity* is not accuracy. A person's honest report is evidence about what the person experienced and how the person interpreted it. Honesty does not itself verify the interpretation. This is true for religious and nonreligious testimony alike.

Second, *transformation* is not source identity. A practice can produce courage, sobriety, reconciliation, or endurance through several causal paths. Beneficial effects may be evidence that a practice is psychologically or socially powerful. To establish a specific supernatural source, the effects must discriminate that source from alternatives capable of producing similar change.

Third, *internal fit* is not external uniqueness. An experience can fit a tradition because the tradition supplies the concepts through which the experience is noticed and described. That fit may be expected if the tradition is true, but it may also be expected if formation shapes interpretation. Further evidence is needed to compare those explanations.

None of this establishes a skeptical victory in advance. It sets a fair identity question: what features of the experience, source, and surrounding evidence make the specifically Christian interpretation better supported than live rivals? A reply can cite history, cumulative experience, coherence, moral knowledge, fulfilled prediction, or an externalist account of proper function. Each route can be evaluated. The verse's evidence-like vocabulary cannot stand in for the evaluation because rival communities can apply equally confident vocabulary to themselves.

8 Private Warrant and Public Proof

One objection now becomes urgent: demanding public evidence may impose an inappropriate standard on a personal relationship. People know friends through accumulated interaction that cannot be packaged for strangers. A child may reasonably trust a parent without a comparative likelihood argument. If faith is relational trust, why demand more?

The answer is to match the conclusion to the evidence status. A subject may reasonably trust through a history that outsiders cannot fully access. The subject's inability to reproduce the relationship in public does not show that the relationship is imaginary. Likewise, an externalist theory permits warrant to depend on a reliable process even when the subject cannot prove that reliability from independent premises.

But two limits follow. First, the personal claim remains dependent on the process actually being reliable and correctly identified. Externalism removes the requirement that the subject prove the connection; it does not remove the connection. Second, when the subject offers the assurance as proof to another person, the testimonial bridge becomes part of the public case. The other person can reasonably ask what the experience was, why it indicates this source, how error is detected, and how incompatible reports are handled.

An everyday comparison helps. A person can know a spouse is trustworthy through years of direct interaction. A stranger may rationally withhold judgment because that history is unavailable. If the person then asks the stranger to transfer money on the spouse's instructions, testimony about the relationship may count as evidence, but the stakes make identity and authentication relevant. The stranger's caution does not insult the relationship. It reflects a different epistemic position.

Hebrews can operate within the first-person or community position. Its audience is urged to persevere within a shared story. When the verse is moved into public apologetics, the audience and task change. The apologist is no longer merely reminding insiders how to live toward a trusted promise; the apologist

is offering grounds to someone who may not yet accept the promisor, promise, or text. The new task requires a visible bridge.

The audience-sensitive result

A reason can warrant one person without being equally available to everyone. Yet a public proof claim incurs a public transmission burden. Hebrews 11:1 may articulate insider trust without thereby furnishing an outsider with the grounds needed to identify the promisor and verify the promise.

9 Objections and Replies

9.1 Objection 1: The verse is revelation, so no further bridge is needed

If Hebrews is a reliable revelation from the deity it specifies, then its testimony can warrant claims about faith and unseen realities. The premise is substantial. To a reader who already has warranted grounds for the text's revelatory status, the verse may transmit warrant through testimony. In public argument, however, citing the verse cannot establish its own revelatory authority without some further account. The bridge may involve historical testimony, a canonical theory, religious experience, an externalist source, or a cumulative case. The paper does not forbid those routes; it makes them visible.

9.2 Objection 2: The unseen is known by a spiritual faculty, not ordinary evidence

Plantinga's extended Aquinas/Calvin model proposes a specifically Christian process involving scripture, faith, and the internal work of the Holy Spirit (Plantinga 2000). If Christianity is true and the process functions as described, it could yield warranted belief without inferential proof. This is a direct answer to the personal-warrant question. It is not an inference from the bare fact of assurance. The model identifies a proposed source and truth connection. Public assessment then turns on whether the Christian source model is true and how defeaters are handled. The proof burden has been addressed by a substantive theory, not erased by Hebrews' vocabulary.

9.3 Objection 3: Evidence need not discriminate among every imaginable rival

Correct. A reasoner need not compare an infinite list of possibilities. Relevant rivals are those made live by background knowledge, actual disagreement, known failure modes, or the stakes of the conclusion. The requirement is proportional. If the claim is merely that a person had a meaningful experience, few rivals need attention. If the claim identifies a specific transcendent source and is offered as public proof of a detailed theological system, competing source and formation accounts become relevant.

9.4 Objection 4: Assurance can itself be caused by truth

Yes. Perception often produces confidence because the perceived object is present. A truthful deity could produce assurance in an analogous or otherwise reliable way. The paper's argument allows this possibility. It denies only the inference from assurance alone to its cause. To know that truth produced the assurance rather than an alternative, one needs information about the production route. Otherwise the proposed cause is one explanation among others.

9.5 Objection 5: Likelihood language reduces faith to statistics

The likelihood ratio is a teaching device for one feature of evidential support: discrimination. The probabilities need not be measured, and the model does not capture every dimension of trust, testimony, or relationship. One can restate the question without numbers: would this datum be notably less

expected if a relevant rival were true? If not, the datum does little comparative work. Moral and relational reasons may remain important even when they are not numerical.

9.6 Objection 6: The argument assumes evidentialism

Evidentialism, in one common sense, holds that a person’s justified beliefs must fit the evidence available to that person. The present argument does not require that doctrine. It grants externalist warrant for the sake of argument. Its claim is conditional: if assurance is offered as evidence or proof for an object, then its truth connection and reach matter. A belief might be warranted through a reliable process the subject cannot demonstrate. What it cannot do is become a public proof merely because the subject labels the output “evidence.”

9.7 Objection 7: Hebrews 11 lists historical examples, so the chapter supplies its own evidence

The catalogue supplies narrative testimony about figures who acted in trust. It can show how the author understands faithful endurance and how remembered exemplars support exhortation. Whether the narrated events occurred as presented, whether the promises came from the specified deity, and whether the examples confirm the chapter’s theology are further historical and theological questions. The chapter may contribute to a cumulative case; verse 1 does not settle the case by definition.

10 A Constructive Proof-Burden Audit

The paper’s result is most useful as an audit rather than a slogan. When faith, assurance, conviction, evidence, or proof appears in an argument, ask the following five questions.

Table 3: Five questions for auditing an assurance-to-evidence claim.

Question	What to record	Warning sign
Datum	The experience, testimony, behavior, text, or argument actually being offered.	The word <i>faith</i> replaces a description of the information.
Target	The exact proposition the datum is meant to support.	A general experience is used to establish a doctrinally specific conclusion.
Source bridge	Why the datum is truth-connected to that target and how the source is identified.	The desired source is assumed from the content of the interpretation.
Rival test	Which relevant alternative also predicts the datum and why the target predicts it better.	Only the target’s compatibility with the datum is discussed.
Correction	What would weaken, defeat, or revise the inference.	Every possible outcome is treated as confirmation.

The audit can produce mixed results. A believer may have strong personal warrant while the public case remains incomplete. A historical argument may support one component of a tradition without supporting every promise associated with it. A religious experience may identify a broad source while leaving doctrinal details underdetermined. Such local verdicts are more informative than the binary claim that faith either is or is not evidence.

The audit also improves apologetic practice. Instead of saying “faith is evidence,” a speaker can state: “I take this testimony and experience to support this proposition because of these reliability

considerations; here are the alternatives I have considered; here is what would change my confidence.” That formulation does not weaken faith. It shows where trust is earned and where uncertainty remains.

For biblical interpretation, the audit protects Hebrews from being assigned a task it may not be performing. A pastoral exhortation can characterize faithful life without functioning as a modern treatise on public evidence. Recognizing genre and audience lets the verse do its rhetorical work while preventing a later reader from using one translated noun as a substitute for an argument.

11 Conclusion

Hebrews 11:1 can be read through assurance, conviction, substance, present reality, evidence, proof, or title-deed imagery. The lexical and exegetical debate matters, but no winner dissolves the proof burden. A description of faith’s role is not yet a demonstration of faith’s object.

The key distinction is between evidence of a state and evidence for the state’s object. Assurance directly shows that a person is assured. It may support the object for that person when a reliable, claim-specific, and defeater-sensitive process produces it. It may become public evidence when testimony, corroboration, or argument makes the truth connection assessable. Each transfer can be legitimate. None is accomplished by an evidence-like label alone.

Religious diversity does not refute every claim to personal warrant, but it makes source identity and rival discrimination unavoidable in public argument. Externalist models from Alston and Plantinga preserve the possibility that Christian experience is genuinely truth-connected without antecedent public proof. They do so by proposing a substantive source and reliability structure. That structure bears the burden; the believer’s confidence does not certify it from the inside.

The responsible use of Hebrews 11:1 is therefore constructive. If independent grounds establish the trustworthiness of the deity and promise specified by Hebrews, the verse may name the rational posture of endurance toward fulfillment not yet seen. The warrant comes through the authenticated promisor, testimony, experience, and argument. The verse can describe what warranted trust does. It cannot convert assurance into public proof simply by calling faith *elenchos*.

A Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Ordinary-language argument

- P1.** A subject's assurance that a claim is true directly establishes, at most, the presence of that assured state.
- P2.** To support the claim itself, the assurance must be connected to it through a truth-directed production route that bears on that specific claim.
- P3.** Evidential support is contrastive: the datum must fit the target better than at least the relevant rivals under consideration.
- P4.** Strong assurance can arise under incompatible religious outlooks, so assurance considered generically does not uniquely identify one outlook's source.
- P5.** A subject may nevertheless possess personal warrant if the subject's assurance is in fact produced through a reliable claim-specific process and relevant defeaters are absent or answered.
- P6.** Personal warrant does not automatically become public evidence; public transmission requires assessable testimony, corroboration, or argument connecting the datum to the target.
- P7.** Hebrews 11:1 assigns a role to faith but, taken by itself, does not provide the full source-reliability, specificity, rival, and correction bridge.
- P8.** Therefore, an evidence-like rendering of Hebrews 11:1 does not by itself discharge the proof burden for the unseen claim, although the verse can describe a warranted posture when independent grounds supply the bridge.

The inference is valid as a burden argument: if object-directed support requires a bridge and the verse alone does not supply that bridge, the verse alone does not establish the object. Its sound application depends on the contestable but ordinary premise that evidence for a claim must be connected to the claim's truth rather than merely to a person's confidence.

A.2 Symbols

- s : the subject, or person whose assurance is being considered.
- H : the target unseen claim.
- R : a relevant rival to H .
- B : the shared background information used in the comparison.
- $A_s(H)$: subject s is assured that H is true.
- D_s : the observed datum consisting of s 's assurance.
- LR : the likelihood ratio, which compares how well a datum fits H and R .
- $Rel_s(H, B)$: the process producing s 's assurance is reliable for H in background conditions B .
- $ND_s(H, B)$: no undefeated defeater blocks s 's support for H in B .
- $W_s(H \mid B)$: s has personal warrant for H relative to B .
- $E_{pub}(D, H, R \mid B)$: datum D is publicly assessable evidence favoring H over R relative to B .
- $Bridge(D, H, R, B)$: the source, specificity, rival, and correction conditions connecting D to H are adequately defended.

- $\text{Verse}(A_s(H))$: Hebrews 11:1 is being used to characterize faith as assurance, conviction, evidence, proof, or present reality regarding H .
- $\text{PB}_V(H)$: the proof burden for H has been discharged by the verse alone.
- $\text{HebFit}_s(H \mid B)$: Hebrews' faith language responsibly describes s 's warranted posture toward H relative to B .

A.3 Annotated formal steps

1. Define the immediate datum.

$$D_s := A_s(H).$$

Plain-English annotation. The item first placed before us is the person's assurance that the unseen claim is true. This definition does not yet say whether the claim itself is true.

2. Assurance does not entail its object.

$$A_s(H) \not\Rightarrow H.$$

Plain-English annotation. A person can be completely confident and still be mistaken. The arrow with a slash means "does not logically guarantee." This is a limit on what follows from confidence alone, not a claim that confidence is always irrational.

3. Make comparative support explicit.

$$\text{LR}(D_s; H, R \mid B) = \frac{P(D_s \mid H, B)}{P(D_s \mid R, B)}.$$

Plain-English annotation. The top asks how expected this assurance would be if the target claim were true. The bottom asks how expected it would be if a relevant rival were true. The comparison is always made against stated background information.

4. State the direction of the comparison.

$$\text{LR}(D_s; H, R \mid B) > 1 \implies D_s \text{ favors } H \text{ over } R \text{ relative to } B.$$

Plain-English annotation. When the assurance is more expected under the target than under the rival, it counts in favor of the target in that comparison. This does not prove the target or state its final probability; it identifies one direction of evidential support.

5. Show why generic assurance may fail to discriminate.

$$P(D_s \mid H, B) \approx P(D_s \mid R, B) \implies \text{LR}(D_s; H, R \mid B) \approx 1.$$

Plain-English annotation. If strong assurance is about equally unsurprising whether the target or its rival is true, the assurance by itself does little to choose between them. Incompatible religious confidence makes this a live possibility, not an automatic verdict in every case.

6. Represent a possible route to personal warrant.

$$A_s(H) \wedge \text{Rel}_s(H, B) \wedge \text{ND}_s(H, B) \implies W_s(H \mid B).$$

Plain-English annotation. Assurance can contribute to personal warrant when it is produced by a process that really is reliable for this claim and when no undefeated defeater blocks it. This formula grants the structure proposed by externalist theories; it does not assume that every religious assurance satisfies the conditions.

7. Personal warrant does not automatically transmit.

$$W_s(H \mid B) \not\Rightarrow E_{\text{pub}}(D_s, H, R \mid B).$$

Plain-English annotation. A person may have a good reason that others cannot fully inspect. That personal standing does not automatically give everyone else public evidence. Transmission requires testimony, records, corroboration, or an argument that makes the truth connection assessable.

8. State the public bridge requirement.

$$E_{\text{pub}}(D_s, H, R \mid B) \implies \text{Bridge}(D_s, H, R, B).$$

Plain-English annotation. If the assurance is offered as public evidence, the case must adequately identify its source, show that it reaches the specific claim, compare relevant rivals, and allow correction. These are features of the route, not decorations added to the word *evidence*.

9. Represent what the verse alone contributes.

$$\text{Verse}(A_s(H)) \not\Rightarrow \text{Bridge}(D_s, H, R, B).$$

Plain-English annotation. Calling faith assurance, proof, evidence, substance, or present reality does not logically supply the bridge. The verse may be part of a larger case, but the label alone does not establish source reliability or defeat rivals.

10. Derive the bounded conclusion.

$$\text{Verse}(A_s(H)) \wedge \neg \text{Bridge}(D_s, H, R, B) \implies \neg \text{PB}_V(H).$$

Plain-English annotation. When the verse is offered without the needed bridge, the proof burden for the unseen claim has not been met by that verse alone. The conclusion is deliberately local: it does not say that the claim is false or that no other evidence exists.

11. Preserve the responsible positive use.

$$\text{Bridge}(D_s, H, R, B) \wedge A_s(H) \implies \text{HebFit}_s(H \mid B).$$

Plain-English annotation. If independent grounds genuinely connect the assurance to the claim, Hebrews can name the posture of living toward an unseen fulfillment. The warrant comes through the defended bridge; the verse describes the posture rather than manufacturing the bridge.

A.4 Validity, soundness, and application

The central derivation is valid because it denies only proof *by the verse alone* when a necessary bridge is absent. It would be invalid to infer that H is false, that s lacks all personal warrant, or that no bridge could exist. Those stronger conclusions do not appear in the formulas.

Soundness depends on two substantive judgments. First, evidence for an external claim must bear a truth-directed relation to that claim rather than merely record a believer's confidence. Second, Hebrews 11:1 by itself does not provide the complete source, specificity, rival, and correction account. A critic of this paper can challenge either judgment. Simply translating *elenchos* as "evidence" does not answer them, because that move restates the disputed status without displaying the route.

Application is proposition-specific. A believer's assurance may be strong evidence that the believer is assured, moderate evidence that a community has preserved a tradition, weak public evidence for one contested historical claim, and part of a strong personal warrant route under an externalist model. The framework permits these mixed results and requires the conclusion to remain at the level actually reached.

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