

## Fredrik Franson (TEAM) and Biblical Equality

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***“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7, TNIV).***

Do you have family or friends on the mission field who are women? How many of them preach, teach, and exercise their gifts of leadership beside men on the mission field? Yet, many of the churches that send these women to the mission field do not provide opportunities for them to preach, teach, or exercise leadership when they return home. Does this seem consistent to you?

Last week we glimpsed the biblical foundations for women’s leadership offered by the founder and first president of Prairie Bible School, L.E. Maxwell. Maxwell gave women positions of leadership as members of the board of directors, as professors of theology and Bible doctrine, as principal of Prairie’s High School, and as preachers not only during their summer conferences, but also on Sunday morning in Prairie’s auditorium—the Tabernacle, the largest religious auditorium in Canada.

In a recent interview, Dr. Robert Rakestraw, a graduate of Prairie, a member of CBE and the Evangelical Theological Society, and a retired professor of theology at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, said, “Maxwell was one of the most zealous advocates of missions, and he was also an outspoken advocate of women preaching and teaching at all levels. If you were in favor of missions you had to be egalitarian. I remember Maxwell preaching on Psalm 68:11, the great company of women who published the glad tidings. Maxwell believed that the cause of Christ was shared by both men and women alike.” For this premiere evangelical institution, Scripture was the guide for faith and practice. A passion to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:20) was treasured at Prairie.

There is perhaps no other individual more compatible with the missionary zeal of L.E. Maxwell than Fredrik Franson, founder of the Evangelical Alliance Mission, now TEAM. Born in Sweden in 1852, Franson immigrated to the US and came to faith in Nebraska in 1872. Shortly after meeting D.L. Moody in 1877, Franson launched into the rigors of extensive missionary service on four continents training missionaries, writing, and establishing strategic missionary partnerships. Ultimately, Franson was credited for founding not only TEAM (Evangelical Alliance Mission), but also Danish Mission Confederation, Swiss Alliance Mission, Barmea Alliance Mission, Finnish Alliance Mission, Swedish Evangelical Mission in Japan, and Swedish Alliance Mission.

Franson, like Maxwell, was an ardent supporter of women missionaries. Determined to make known the biblical basis for women’s equal service in any endeavor, Franson wrote *Prophesying Daughters* in 1896. Relying upon a whole Bible approach, *Prophesying Daughters* is striking for its cohesive, original, and concise survey of Scripture. Fundamental to *Prophesying Daughters* is the goal of observing the biblical support to free women from gender prejudice in order to release them for evangelism. He “labeled as heretics those who grounded a doctrine on one or two passages in the Bible, without reading the references in their context” (Charles O. Knowles, [[Let Her Be: Right Relationships and the Southern Baptist Conundrum Over Women’s Role,](#)]

Columbia, MO: KnoWell Publishing, 2002, p. 85). *Prophesying Daughters* opposes the selective reading of Scripture in favor of overarching biblical themes that include, rather than exclude women's God-given gifts. Franson weighed in with the early church fathers and also Martin Luther in his brief defense of women's equality in ministry. Franson perceived no ministry in which women may not lead. He was no gradual emancipationist. He was a full-orbed egalitarian, and his biblical scholarship had one focus—to reveal Scripture's support for women's service on the mission field.

If all of Scripture points to Christ, we cannot afford to overlook the women of Scripture who declared the good news of Jesus. But, their voices have been stopped by those who rely upon two passages (1 Tim. 2:11-15, 1 Cor. 14:24) “without reading them in context” (*Prophesying Daughters*, p.35). If a woman teaching was forbidden, Franson noted,

... the instruction which Prisca gave to Apollos would also be against God's command, and Paul's order to women to be 'good teachers' (Titus 2:3) would be abrogated, and then women's work in Sunday schools, in public schools, and in the teaching they convey through books and articles in religious papers would all be forbidden (*Prophesying Daughters*, p. 36).

“The danger of founding a doctrine on a single text, without comparing it with hundreds of other texts that speak of the same theme, cannot be emphasized enough,” said Franson (*Prophesying Daughters*, p. 36). “If a sister can more easily bring souls to the Savior ... then she sins if she does not use those gifts that God has given her” (*Prophesying Daughters*, p. 39). And the results of this are disastrous in light of eternity. In response to the fact that so many “people are in the water about to drown,” (*Prophesying Daughters*, p.29) Franson wrote:

A few men are trying to save [the drowning], and that is considered well and good. But look, over there a few women have untied a boat also to be of help in the rescue, and immediately a few men cry out... ‘No, no, women must not help, rather let the people drown.’ What stupidity! And yet this picture is very fitting. Men have, during all these centuries, shown that they do not have the power alone to carry out the work for the salvation of the world: therefore, they ought to be thankful to get some help (*Prophesying Daughters*, p. 29).

Egalitarians, with a high view of Scripture, have and continue to root their service in Scripture. Scripture itself compels us to share the greatest love we know—the life of Jesus. Let us remember the profound leadership of Fredrik Franson, L.E. Maxwell, Ruth Dearing and many more. May we “consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb. 13:7b).

Published in *Arise*, the weekly e-newsletter of Christians for Biblical Equality, December 12, 2008

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