449 - An imam is guilty of some secret sin; should he continue in his position as imam?

the question

A young man is an imam in one of the mosques. He is, as he says, well-liked by the people at the mosque, but he knows deep down that he has shortcomings and is guilty of some sins, and does not deserve to be the imam or to have this love and respect from people. He fears that if he remains as imam of the mosque, he may become a hypocrite or show off. Should he stay in the mosque? Should he continue leading the people in prayer, or should he leave this position out of fear of becoming a hypocrite and show off?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

You describe this young man as being loved by his people, but he is guilty of some transgression which is a matter between him and his Lord. I say that the fact that Allah has blessed him with the position of imam and the love of his people dictates that he should give up his sin and stop transgressing against himself, and he should worship Allah properly, and give thanks to Allah, because the fact that a person is loved by his people and is their imam is a great blessing from Allah. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And the slaves of the Most Beneficient (Allah) are those who walk on the earth in humility and sedateness…

And those who say: ‘Our Lord… and make us leaders for the muttaqoon (the pious)…” [al-Furqaan 25:63-74]

Those who pray are among the pious, and the one who leads them in prayer is included in this aayah, “…and make us leaders for the muttaqoon (the pious)…” So let him praise Allah for this

blessing, and stop transgressing against himself, and let him make this one of the means of bringing himself back to obedience to Allah, and let him fear Allah with regard to his status.

When he says that he is afraid he may show off, this is waswaas (insinuating thoughts) that the Shaytaan puts into a person's mind whenever he wants to do an act of obedience to Allah. The Shaytaan comes to him and says, "You are showing off." He has to cast this idea aside, ignore it and seek the help of Allah, for he always recites in his salaah the words, "Iyyaaka na'budu wa iyyaaka nasta'een (You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help" [al-Fatihah 1:5 – interpretation of the meaning].