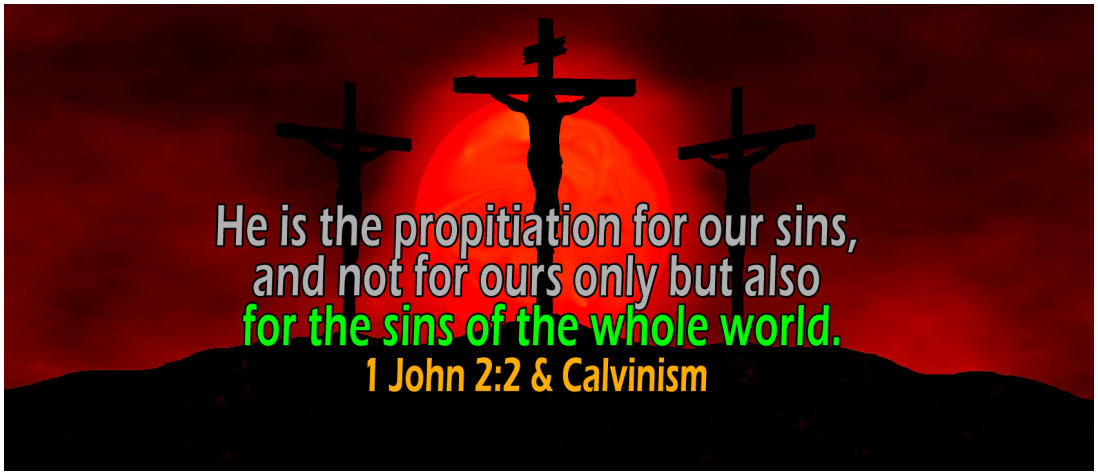
1 John 2:2, 'for the sins of the whole world'

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1 John 2:2

> My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 1 John 2:1-2 (ESV)

(For a better and more recent defense see here.)

The first word to examine is propitiation. **Propitiation** (**ἱλασμός,** G2434) means the *appeasement of (divine wrath of) God.* Thus it means the forgiveness of sins as seen for example in Rom 3:25, 1 Jn 4:10. If we take the "sins of the world world" to mean the sins of every single individual who has ever lived, then we have Universalism on our hands, which is not consistent with the whole testimony of the Bible. Second, we know from the Bible that *we have to believe to be saved, we need to have faith* to be redeemed (Rom 10:9-10; c.f. "Repentance and faith are necessary for salvation").

There is a passage in the Gospel according to John that is very similar to 1 Jn 2:2 and I believe it will help us understand what 1 Jn 2:2 is talking about. The passage is **Jn 11:51-52.**

1 John 2:2	John 11:51-52
He is the propitiation for our sins,	...he prophesied that Jesus would **die for the nation**,
and not for ours only	and **not for the nation only,**
but also for the sins of the whole world.	but also to **gather** into one the **children of God who are scattered abroad.**

John, as a Jew apostle of Jesus was talking to fellow Jew believers and telling them that God not only has a special love for Israel, but also for people/nations outside of Israel. That, Jesus didn't only die for His people according to the flesh, but also for those who were not Jews, which was shocking to the Jews. This is almost the same message of love that God has for people/nations other than Israel in Jn 3:16.

So, when we put 1 Jn 2:2 and Jn 11:51-52 together to understand 1 Jn 2:2 better, we see that the Apostle is using the word **"the whole world"** in 1 Jn 2:2 not as *every individual who lives or has lived*, but more as the "**children of God who are scattered abroad**." And those are the ones for whom Christ died, the Gentile elect and the Jew elect.

Commentaries

The **ESV Study Bible** explains: [1]

> 1 John 2:2 **Propitiation** (Gk.hilasmos) here means "a sacrifice that bears God's wrath and turns it to favor," and that is

also the meaning of the English word “propitiation.” (See note on Rom. 3:25.) As the perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus turns away God’s wrath (see also 1 John 4:10). **For the sins of the whole world** does not mean that every person will be saved, for John is clear that forgiveness of sins comes only to those who repent and believe the gospel (see 2:4, 23; 3:10; 5:12; cf.John 3:18; 5:24). But Jesus’ sacrifice is offered and made available to everyone in “the whole world,” not just to John and his current readers.

The **ESV MacArthur Study Bible** explains: [2]

Propitiation. C.f. 4:10. The word means “appeasement” or “satisfaction.” The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross satisfied the demands of God’s holiness for the punishment of sin (cf. Rom. 1:18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Eph 2:3). So Jesus propitiated or satisfied God. **For the sins of the whole world.** This is a generic term, referring not to every single individual, but to mankind in general. Christ actually paid the penalty only for those who would repent and believe. A number of Scripture indicates that Christ died for the world (John 1:29; 3:16; 6:51; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb 2:9). Most of the world will be eternally condemned to hell to pay for their own sins, so they could not have been paid for by Christ. The passages that speak of Christ’s dying for the whole world must be understood to refer to mankind in general (as in Titus 2:3-4). “World” indicates the sphere, the beings toward whom God seeks reconciliation and has provided propitiation. God has mitigated his wrath on sinners temporarily, by letting them live and enjoy earthly life. In that sense, Christ has provided a brief, temporal propitiation for the whole world. But he actually satisfied fully the wrath of God eternally only for the elect who believe. Christ’s death in itself had unlimited and infinite value because he is Holy God. Thus his sacrifice was sufficient to pay the penalty for all the sins of all whom God brings to faith. But the actual satisfaction and atonement was made only for those who believe (cf. John 10:11, 15; 17:9, 20; Acts 20:28; Rom 8:32, 37; Eph 5:25). The pardon for sin is offered to the whole world, but received only by those who believe (cf. 1 John 4:9, 14; John 5:24). There is no other way to be reconciled to God.

The **HCSB Study Bible** says: [3]

Jesus' perfect obedience and sacrificial death satisfied God's just demand for sin to be punished (**propitiation**). But His punishment was for others, not for Himself. The phrase **for those of the whole world** does not mean the salvation of all people. It does mean that, in keeping with God's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:3), Jesus' saving death extends the offer of salvation to all nations.

This is what **John Gill** said: [4]

- **And he is the propitiation for our sins**,.... For the sins of us who now believe, and are Jews:
- **and not for ours only**; but for the sins of Old Testament saints, and of those who shall hereafter believe in Christ, and of the Gentiles also, signified in the next clause:
- **but also for [the sins] of the whole world**; the Syriac version renders it, "not for us only, but also for the whole world"; that is, not for the Jews only, for John was a Jew, and so were those he wrote unto, but for the Gentiles also. Nothing is more common in Jewish writings than to call the Gentiles □□□□, "the world"; and
- □□□□□ □□, "the whole world"; and □□□□□ □□□□□, "the nations of the world" {l}; [See comments on John 12:19]; and the word "world" is so used in Scripture; see Joh 3:16; and stands opposed to a notion the Jews have of the Gentiles, that □□□□ □□□ □□□, "there is no propitiation for them" {m}: and it is easy to observe, that when this phrase is not used of the Gentiles, it is to be understood in a limited and restrained sense; as when they say {n},
- "it happened to a certain high priest, that when he went out of the sanctuary, □□□□ □□□□, "the whole world" went after him;''
- which could only design the people in the temple. And elsewhere {o} it is said,
- "amle ylwk, "the "whole world" has left the Misna, and gone after the "Gemara";''
- which at most can only intend the Jews; and indeed only a majority of their doctors, who were conversant with these writings: and in another place {p},
- "amle ylwk, "the whole world" fell on their faces, but Raf did not fall on his face;''

- where it means no more than the congregation. Once more, it is said {q}, when
- "R. Simeon ben Gamaliel entered (the synagogue), □□□□ □□□□, "the whole world" stood up before him;''
- that is, the people in the synagogue: to which may be added {r},
- "when a great man makes a mourning, □□□□ □□□□, "the whole world" come to honour him;''
- i.e. a great number of persons attend the funeral pomp: and so these phrases, □□ □□□□ □□□□ □□□□□, "the whole world" is not divided, or does not dissent {s}; □□□□ □□□□ □□□□, "the whole world" are of opinion {t}, are frequently met with in the Talmud, by which, an agreement among the Rabbins, in certain points, is designed; yea, sometimes the phrase, "all the men of the world" {u}, only intend the inhabitants of a city where a synagogue was, and, at most, only the Jews: and so this phrase, "all the world", or "the whole world", in Scripture, unless when it signifies the whole universe, or the habitable earth, is always used in a limited sense, either for the Roman empire, or the churches of Christ in the world, or believers, or the present inhabitants of the world, or a part of them only, Lu 2:1; and so it is in this epistle, 1Jo 5:19; where the whole world lying in wickedness is manifestly distinguished from the saints, who are of God, and belong not to the world; and therefore cannot be understood of all the individuals in the world; and the like distinction is in this text itself, for "the sins of the whole world" are opposed to "our sins", the sins of the apostle and others to whom he joins himself; who therefore belonged not to, nor were a part of the whole world, for whose sins Christ is a propitiation as for theirs: so that this passage cannot furnish out any argument for universal redemption; for besides these things, it may be further observed, that for whose sins Christ is a propitiation, their sins are atoned for and pardoned, and their persons justified from all sin, and so shall certainly be glorified, which is not true of the whole world, and every man and woman in it; moreover, Christ is a propitiation through faith in his blood, the benefit of his propitiatory sacrifice is only received and enjoyed through faith; so that in the event it appears that Christ is a propitiation only for believers, a character which does not agree with all mankind; add to this, that for whom Christ is a propitiation he is also an advocate, 1Jo 2:1; but he is not an advocate for every individual person in the world; yea, there is a world he will not pray for Joh 17:9, and consequently is not a propitiation for them. Once more, the design of the apostle in these words is to comfort his "little children" with the advocacy and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, who might fall into sin through weakness and inadvertency; but what comfort would it yield to a distressed mind, to be told that Christ was a propitiation not only for the sins of the apostles and other saints, but for the sins of every individual in the world, even of these that are in hell? Would it not be natural for persons in such circumstances to argue rather against, than for themselves, and conclude that seeing persons might be damned notwithstanding the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, that this might, and would be their case. In what sense Christ is a propitiation, [See comments on Ro 3:25]. The Jews have no notion of the Messiah as a propitiation or atonement; sometimes they say {w} repentance atones for all sin; sometimes the death of the righteous {x}; sometimes incense {y}; sometimes the priests' garments {z}; sometimes it is the day of atonement {a}; and indeed they are in the utmost puzzle about atonement; and they even confess in their prayers {b}, that they have now neither altar nor priest to atone for them; [See comments on 1Jo 4:10]. John Gill, Exposition of the Bible

What **Matthew Henry** said about 1 John 2:1-2 -- [5]

By the plea he has to make, the ground and basis of his advocacy: And he is the propitiation for our sins, v. 2. He is the expiatory victim, the propitiatory sacrifice that has been offered to the Judge for all our offences against his majesty, and law, and government. In vain do the professors of Rome distinguish between and advocate of redemption and an advocate of intercession, or a mediator of such different service. The Mediator of intercession, the Advocate for us, is

the Mediator of redemption, the propitiation for our sins. It is his propitiation that he pleads. And we might be apt to suppose that his blood had lost its value and efficacy if no mention had been made of it in heaven since the time it was shed. But now we see it is of esteem there, since it is continually represented in the intercession of the great advocate (the attorney-general) for the church of God. He ever lives to make intercession for those that come to God through him. 4. By the extent of his plea, the latitude of his propitiation. It is not confined to one nation; and not particularly to the ancient Israel of God: He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only (not only for the sins of us Jews, us that are Abraham's seed according to the flesh), but also for those of the whole world (v. 2); not only for the past, or us present believers, but for the sins of all who shall hereafter believe on him or come to God through him. The extent and intent of the Mediator's death reach to all tribes, nations, and countries. As he is the only, so he is the universal atonement and propitiation for all that are saved and brought home to God, and to his favour and forgiveness.

We Have An Advocate With The Father

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 1 John 2:1 (ESV)

Often critics seem to ignore or miss the significance of 1 John 2:1. Who's advocate is the Lord Jesus? For whom is He interceding? Are we seriously gonna say that He intercedes for those who are in Hell? How about those whom He knows they're never going to repent and receive Him? Are we really going to say that Christ fails in His intercession? I dare not say such thing to the mighty finished work of the Lord Jesus, when He said "it is finished!" He meant it.

For whom does Christ intercede?

Rom 8:34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Heb 7:25 Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

Heb 9:24 For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

1Tim 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

From these verses and the context of these it seems clear that Christ intercedes for His sheep just like He did in John 17. He expressively said that He was not praying for the world, but those whom the Father has given Him (John 17:9). The Lord was praying for those on whose behalve His work was done. For those whom He will lay His life for. If He would not even pray for them why would anyone think that He went on the cross for them to take away their sins or '*try*' to save them?

This content is taken from this document

[1] ESV Study Bible, 2008 (Crossway). Taken from the Online Version at www.esvbible.org

[2] John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible 2010, Crossway. Taken from the online version at www.esvbible.org

[3] HCSB (Holman Christian Standard Bible®) Study Bible 2010, Holman Bible Publishers. Taken from the online version at www.mystudybible.com

[4] John Gill, Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the Bible software The Word. See “Resources.”

[5] Matthew Henry, Whole Bible Commentary, taken from the Bible software The Word. See “Resources.”