1 John 2:2
He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Synergistic Difficulties:

#1) “propitiation”

#2) “whole world”

#1) PROPITIATION

The word “propitiation” means, “an appeasing.” 1 John 2:2 demonstrates that Jesus not only made salvation possible, but he actually appeased the wrath of God regarding the sin of His people. If Jesus had propitiated God’s wrath for every single person in the world, it would result in universalism – every person going to heaven.

Some would argue that this is a general propitiation for everyone, only securing the possibility of salvation. This is an incorrect view for the following reasons:

• It cannot be meant that all sins are atoned for with the exception of unbelief, because unbelief is a sin and would be included.

• Romans 8:32 states, “32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” Based on this verse, it is only logical that if God intended to secure propitiation for every single person, that he would also provide all spiritual gifts for every single person.

• In the previous verse (1 John 2:1) it says that Jesus is their Advocate with the Father. The conjunction “and” connects this with verse 2 that says Jesus is their propitiation. Therefore, if Jesus were the propitiation of every single person, He would also have to be an Advocate with the Father for every single person.
• It is not grammatically faithful to the text to say that 1 John 2:2 refers to “possible propitiation” to every single person in history, because the text says Christ “is” the propitiation for our sin.

#2) WHOLE WORLD

In what sense is John using the phrase “whole world?” Does he mean every person in the world (without exception), or that the whole world (without distinction) is represented?

Consider these comparison texts:

Revelation 5:9 (New American Standard Bible)

9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

Notice that not only was salvation made possible, but that this people was purchased. Also, notice to whom the atonement extended: to men from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

Notice how the following passage from John 11 is not only from the same author, but parallels the 1 John passage.

John 11: 49-52 (New American Standard Bible)

49 But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish."

50 Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation,

51 and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. (emphasis mine)
Notice the parallels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1 John 2:2</strong></th>
<th><strong>John 11: 51-52</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...He Himself is the propitiation for our sins...</td>
<td>...he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...and not for ours only...</td>
<td>...and not for the nation only...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...but also for those of the whole world.</td>
<td>...He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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This comparison shows that the “our” in 1 John 2:2 should be understood to refer to ethnicity. It is being contrasted with the fact that the atonement went beyond believing Israelites to the elect Gentile “children of God” scattered abroad.

Understanding 1 John 2:2 to mean that the whole world would be represented fits perfectly within the meaning presented in Revelation 5:9 and John 11:51-52. However, incorrectly interpreting “whole world” in 1 John 2:2 to mean every single person in world, would make it become inconsistent with these other two passages.

Sources:

Propitiation in 1 John 2:2, by Dr. Gary D. Long  
http://www.the-highway.com/1Jh2.2.html

Common Attacks Against Reformed Theology (Part V)  
by Dr. James White  
http://www.prbc.org/Sermons2.htm